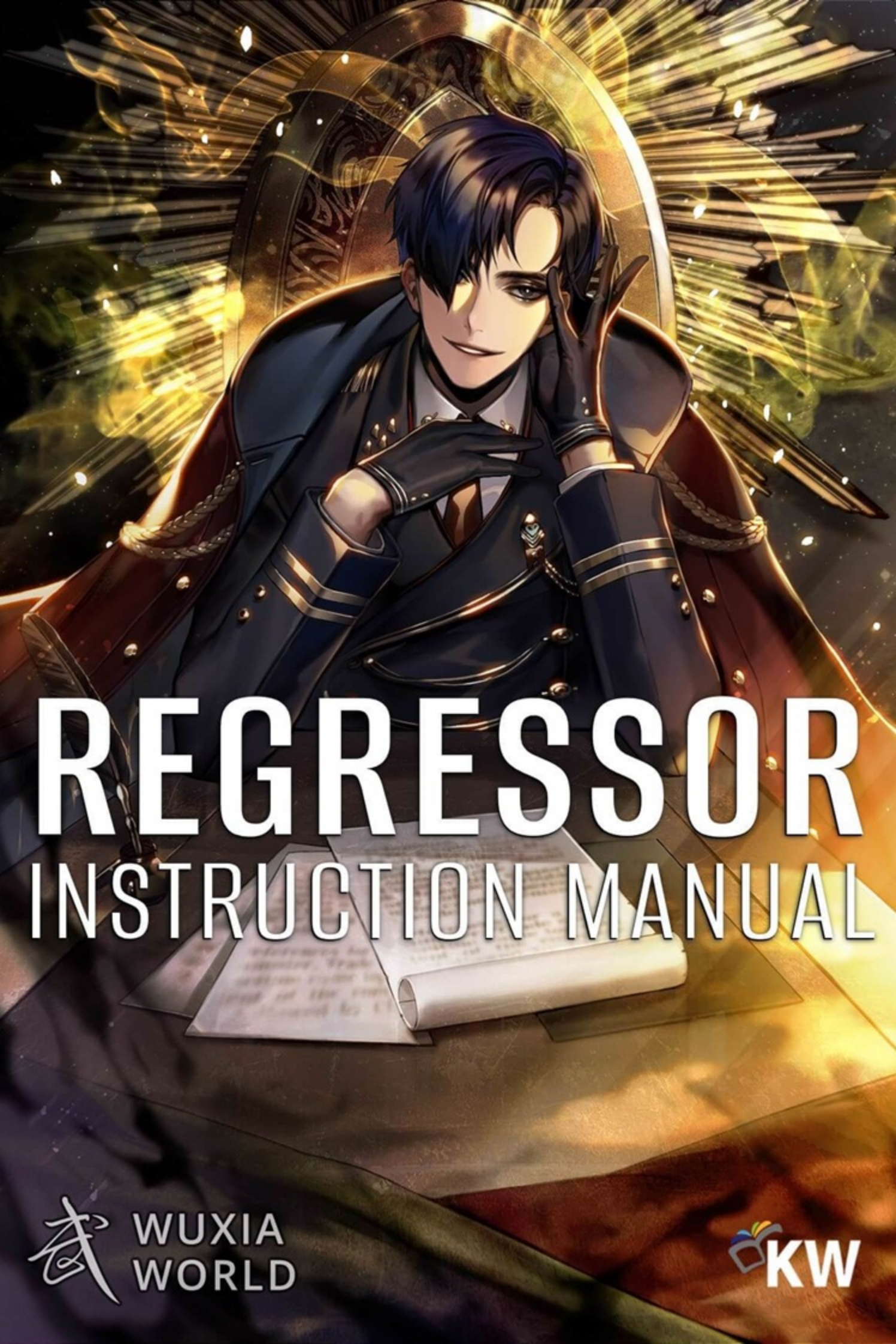
REGRESSOR
INSTRUCTION MANUAL
WUXIA WORLD
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REGRESSOR INSTRUCTION MANUAL

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[WUXIAWORLD]

CHAPTER 950
MOOD (1)

I had never really gotten used to wearing a full uniform.

During the tragic kidnapping incident, I had a dirty blanket over my head most of the time.

I had been wearing loose clothing these days, so this outfit felt awkward for me.

I fixed my outfit and walked slowly outside.

I saw priests and Holy Knights walking over toward me. I was sure they had a lot to say to me. They looked at each other, and it was probably because they had no idea how to deliver the shocking news to me.

Eventually, a priest closed his eyes and stammered, “F-Father Lee Ki-Young.”

“I know, Father Pes,” I said.

“*Ah…*”

“I would like for you to investigate this incident closely and gather as much detail as possible. I heard how there's a high chance that they're the ones behind this,” I requested.

“Yes, sir,” Father Pes answered.

“The Blue Guild will also do what we can,” I added.

‘I was feeling kind of confident there.’

Even I thought that I was being kind of bold.

Of course, I had no intention of doing this, but it wasn’t a bad setup at all.

They thought I would be grieving, be sad, or act really shocked, but I got up from my seat instead.

I made them think that something different would happen, as the incident had taken a different turn.

I was sure my outfit helped with that as well because I was expressing that my mindset had changed a bit. This outfit made me look more charismatic than the priest outfit.

People had been looking at me with sympathy or pity; the majority of them were worried about whether I'd be able to overcome the pain or not, but the Holy Knights and priests nearby didn't look at me that way anymore.

They treated me as a determined saint who had overcome his wounds; they were looking at me as the hero of the continent responsible for maintaining the continent's equilibrium.

'Kim Hyun-Sung isn't the only hero.'

There was a great conspiracy around the Vatican.

There were still anomalies happening throughout the continent, and the priests were nervous because they couldn't hear Goddess Benigoa's voice for some reason.

Some looked at me with worried gazes, thinking that I stood up because of Templar Gen, but it wasn't enough to affect the overall situation. It really wasn't bad, as they were simply worried about the weak honorary cardinal.

The guild members were the problem.

Lee Chang-Ryeol had an idea as to what was going on, so he stayed quiet for now, but most of the members looked worried. Jo Hye-Jin, Park Deok-Gu, and Kim Ye-Ri looked worried, along with Sun Hee-Young and Elena.

The priests were worried as well.

Of course, I could understand why they were worried. It hadn't been that long since the incident, after all.

In that sense, Ahn Ki-Mo wasn't all that different from them.

He was a berserker crazy about blood, but in the end, he was a holy knight as well.

Blacksmith Yoo Ah-Young and Great Mage Hwang Jung-Yeon were worried as well.

Alps holding onto Shiro, and the new guild member Belier were there as well, even though they looked quite awkward.

I also saw Jung Ha-Yan, who looked quite uncomfortable, and Han Sora, who was nervous about Jung Ha-Yan's reaction.

The guild members were here, so I was kind of happy, but I was kind of worried about their reaction. The majority of them were worried about me, while the others were trying to read the room.

It was such a shocking incident, and they were now face-to-face with the sub guild master covered in wounds.

I had been claiming that Gen was innocent, but they had been shouting that he was guilty. In the end, we entered a state of lull during the trials. I was the one who refused to meet them, but they were the ones uncomfortable, as they had seen me covered in wounds at the time.

"The mood is pretty serious," Chang-Ryeol said, breaking the silence.

"…"

"…"

'I can't even make a joke.'

"It's been a while, sir."

'I'll make sure to take care of you.'

He was a loyal member who had turned a blind eye to the incident.

Actually, he did more than just turn a blind eye. At the time, Lee Chang-Ryeol had appointed himself as my guard, and the fact that he had failed to protect me had

ruined his reputation.

The Blue Guild as a whole didn't scold him since the guild wasn't the type to put the blame on others, but it was highly likely that Kim Hyun-Sung or Jo Hye-Jin had scolded him. They could have punished him or deducted his pay.

Everyone here knew that Lee Chang-Ryeol was competent, so negligence was the only explanation as to why he ended up losing me and had even failed to track me down.

'That's right, Chang-Ryeol. You were always on my side.'

Just as I expected, Jung Ha-Yan was glaring at Lee Chang-Ryeol, and it was understandable, as blaming others had always been her way to cope and stabilize her mental state.

"You're here, Mr. Hyun-Sung," I greeted.

"I'm sorry for being late," Kim Hyun-Sung said.

However, even Kim Hyun-Sung frowned upon seeing Lee Chang-Ryeol.

'Our Chang-Ryeol is innocent… What should I do? Looks like he went through a lot more than I thought.'

"I don't remember lifting Mr. Chang-Ryeol's punishment," Kim Hyun-Sung remarked.

'You don't even let him attend meetings anymore?'

"I'm sorry, sir."

"I-I summoned him, so please don't scold him," I told him.

"I understand how you feel, but rules are rules, Mr. Ki-Young. Due to many reasons, such as negligence, Mr. Chang-Ryeol is no longer an official guild member. Thus, he cannot attend our meetings, Mr. Ki-Young. If we were at war, he would be hanged for his negligence," Kim Hyun-Sung argued.

'Why is he talking about hanging someone?'

The situation was more serious than I thought.

Yoo Ah-Young stood up quietly and cried while staring at Lee Chang-Ryeol.

Yoo Ah-Young's reaction gave me an idea about just how much Lee Chang-Ryeol had suffered in the meantime.

“It’s not his fault, Mr. Hyun-Sung. My behavior is the problem here…” I told him.

“There’s nothing wrong with your behavior,” Kim Hyun-Sung denied.

'No, there is. It’s a big problem.'

“Please withdraw his punishment; at least, punish him only after all this. Of course, the guild has rules, and I don't want to destroy them due to this special incident, but the Blue Guild really needs Mr. Chang-Ryeol’s power right now,” I requested.

'I can go on forever about how important rangers are when raiding a dungeon.'

“But…”

“Please, I beg you,” I said.

“*Whoo…*”

“I also ask that others don’t scold Mr. Chang-Ryeol too much. It’s my fault, not his fault. I thought nothing bad was going to happen, so I ignored those who were trying to keep me safe,” I explained.

“I-It’s not your fault, hyung-nim,” Park Deok-Gu chimed in.

“It’s also my fault that Mr. Chang-Ryeol didn’t fully cooperate. It’s not solely his fault…” I said.

“It’s my fault, sir,” Lee Chang-Ryeol said.

‘No, it’s not your fault. You just need to gain their trust again through this expedition. Don’t worry too much, Ah-Young. And I won’t forget your kindness and for keeping quiet about it, Chang-Ryeol.

'So, what are you going to do, Kim Hyun-Sung? Are you really going to let your emotions control you?'

"Mr. Chang-Ryeol isn't the only one who's at fault, so I should be punished along with him," I suggested.

'You're not actually going to change the topic, are you?'

"…"

"*Whoo…*"

'That's what I'm talking about.'

"I'll withdraw his punishment," Kim Hyun-Sung said.

"I will follow your orders, Master. Thank you for giving me a chance."

It seemed that Kim Hyun-Sung was really hurting, as he didn't even respond to Lee Chang-Ryeol's words. It appeared that he only withdrew Lee Chang-Ryeol's punishment because of my desperate words.

I wasn't sure whether it was because of the mood earlier or not, but the atmosphere was still heavy. People were looking at each other awkwardly, and the silence was suffocating, unlike during our previous meetings when the mood was always boisterous.

The members didn't chat with each other, and all I could hear was the sound of everyone gulping a mouthful of their own saliva instead of laughing with each other.

'This isn't right… '

I glanced over at Park Deok-Gu.

"H-Hyung-nim…" Park Deok-Gu stuttered.

'No, not that. I don't need people to sympathize with me.'

"*Sniff!*"

‘Don’t cry, damn it. Don’t cry.’

“*Sob… Sob…!*”

‘Jung Ha-Yan looks like she's about to cry because you’re crying.’

“S-Sub guild master…”

‘Elena looks like she's about to cry because Ha-Yan is crying.’

“…”

‘Even Jo Hye-Jin looks like she's about to cry because Elena is crying.’

I looked around to see whether there was anyone who could resolve this situation or not, but I couldn't see anyone like that. They started crying one after another, and in just under one minute, half of the guild members were already crying.

I looked at a certain guild member.

Fortunately, he was quick-witted, so I hoped he'd quickly realize what I wanted him to do.

‘Ahn Ki-Mo. Please… ’

“Everyone… please calm down. I know something unpleasant has happened this morning, but the sub guild master has regained his health, so can't today be considered a good day as well?

"It’s been a while since we gathered like this, and I’m sure he doesn’t want to see everyone being so sad,” Ahn Ki-Mo said.

‘Yeah, that’s what I’m talking about.’

“H-He’s right,” Park Deok-Gu chimed in.

‘Nice.’

“I-I’m sure this isn’t what hyung-nim wants. All right! Stop crying, noonim! You, too, Elena noonim. Stop crying,” Park Deok-Gu said.

“Mister Ki-Mo is right,” Kim Ye-Ri commented.

“Now, let’s all show our lively side!” Ahn Ki-Mo yelled.

It was such a bizarre sight seeing them trying to act all lively and happy when they were actually sad.

“I think we should start with a cup of tea,” I suggested.

We were sitting at a large, round table, but I started chatting with Kim Hyun-Sung, who was sitting beside me. We were actually busy, but it was better than going on an expedition in such a heavy mood.

“Yes, that’s right.”

I laughed at his ridiculous words…

‘At least he’s happy.’

“Come to think of it, Whitefall—”

“I heard it as well. I’m glad they’re getting along,” I interrupted.

We also talked about the griffons.

I took a sip of my tea and turned to Ha-Yan. Naturally, I nagged the pig as well.

Eventually, I turned to Belier and asked her about how her life in the guild was.

“Miss Alps has been taking good care of me, so I have no issues adapting, sir!” Belier answered.

“Belier is really interested in the history of the continent, and she’s been holing up in the guild’s hall of records since she joined the guild,” Alps said.

"Really?” I asked.

“I didn’t… do that,” Belier mumbled.

“She’s been up late almost every night since then. There were times when she’d stay

up until dawn… The 27th Legion Summoning, the Resurrection Day… I'm sure she's been looking up many things that are hard for anyone to read…" Alps added.

'That's true. I don't even want to read about the Song Soo-Kyung incident again. The script was really brutal.'

"I wasn't a guild member at the time, and I-I just wanted to understand the Blue Guild more… The incidents that the guild had gone through are incidents only I didn't get to experience, and I want to sympathize with the pain you experienced.

"I-I-I… want to grow stronger… and contribute more to the Blue Guild…" Belier explained.

"Bel… you're such a sincere person… If there are hundreds of you, I'd agree to accept all of them into the guild," Park Deok-Gu said.

"How commendable. I didn't think you were *that* kind of person," Sun Hee-Young remarked.

"Hey, you should try to get to know the new guild member, Hee-Young noonim. You're being too distant," Park Deok-Gu said.

"…"

'That's it.'

It didn't take long for the atmosphere to return to normal as everyone started talking about random things…

"Hey, Bel. Are you sure you don't have other intentions?" Park Deok-Gu asked.

"No! No! No!!! That's not true!!!" Belier denied.

"Hyung-nim's handsome face… Wait, w-why are you yelling?" Park Deok-Gu asked.

"*Ah? Ah*… t-that's because Miss Jung Ha-Yan is here as well. I was simply… admiring him…" Belier muttered.

"Stop teasing. Her. Mister Deok-Gu. What if. She leaves. The Guild?" Kim Ye-Ri said.

"*Ah!* I-I'm sorry. I took… the joke too far…" Park Deok-Gu said.

Everyone started catching up with each other.

"Hey, Elena noonim. How are things at the Elf Kingdom?" Park Deok-Gu asked.

"My brother is currently…"

"I see. I'm glad he's doing well," he said.

"*Ah*, and he said… he wanted to hear Miss Jo Hye-Jin's answer this time no matter what," Elena added.

Kim Hyun-Sung was surprised.

"What kind of answer does Mr. Elias need to hear from Hye-Jin noonim…" Park Deok-Gu asked.

"It's nothing," Jo Hye-Jin answered.

"Did he confess his feelings again?" Park Deok-Gu questioned.

"…"

"Really?" Park Deok-Gu asked.

"That's not important right now," Jo Hye-Jin retorted.

'How can you say it's not important? You should at least try to make Kim Hyun-Sung jealous so that he'll start getting worried. You're really… slow.'

Absolute Evil Elena added, "It's been a while since my brother had formally proposed to Miss Jo Hye-Jin. The elders are against it, but my brother has been adamant about it.

"She has already rejected him twice, so if she rejects him this time, it'll be the third rejection. Personally, I'd like it if Miss Jo Hye-Jin became a part of our family, but… my older brother is really lacking, so I understand the rejection."

I was kind of surprised by the random news concerning the pure-hearted Elias.

'Kim Hyun-Sung, you better watch out, man.'

CHAPTER 951
MOOD (2)

'Actually, Kim Hyun-Sung isn't the only one who needs to be nervous.'

I needed to be nervous as well.

'Hye-Jin is a precious friend of mine… '

"During the World Tree Destruction incident… Mr. Elias has confessed to her… I was there. It was really romantic… I felt like I was watching a drama," Hwang Jung-Yeon said.

"Is that true, Miss Jung-Yeon?" Elena asked.

"Yes."

I was there as well.

'Elias, you old bastard.'

I actually had no idea of his age, but he was definitely somewhere in the hundreds.

It had been a while since we started gossiping, so I was excited to hear some gossip.

In my opinion, Elias' actions were bad. He was so insensitive that he proposed three times to a girl with a bright future ahead of her. He was basically committing a crime.

Jo Hye-Jin was a self-proclaimed technician from Wooshin Girls' High School, but she never really had a proper relationship. Elias ought to have simply enjoyed it and stopped before it could get out of hand.

Why was he even proposing to a girl who had never gotten into a relationship?

I started questioning whether he had a conscience or not.

"…"

"Are we talking about Hye-Jin noonim here?" Park Deok-Gu asked.

"Yes, Mr. Deok-Gu. Whenever we walk on the streets, many people would ask for her number," Hwang Jung-Yeon said. Jo Hye-Jin was surprisingly really popular.

Actually, the word "surprisingly" was rude here.

Jo Hye-Jin's personality and work ethic were great; she was a good fighter, she was smart, and she was cool as well.

She basically had everything one could wish for from a partner.

I could confidently bet that those who had witnessed her swinging her spear had the urge to confess to her almost immediately.

People could easily misunderstand that she was unfriendly, and it was all because of her rigid personality, but her rigid personality was exactly what the elves were looking for from a person.

Jo Hye-Jin was definitely the best partner in the eyes of any elf out there.

And if they could take a peek into someone's soul like Elena, they'd fall even harder for Jo Hye-Jin.

'Although I don't think she'll accept the proposal… '

Still, she had the ruler of the Elf Kingdom buff… and Elias wasn't *that* ugly, so I was sure the kind-hearted Jo Hye-Jin was being swayed by him. Actually, there was a high chance that my assumption was true. Otherwise, Elias wouldn't have proposed to her thrice.

"I didn't know that," Park Deok-Gu said.

"I'm sure… they approached me because of my background. They had either made a business inquiry… or asked questions about joining the guild," Jo Hye-Jin said.

"Oh my, I don't think that's the case. The people who talked to you aren't exactly lacking. Many of them were from influential families, and some of them were even

celebrities," Sun Hee-Young argued.

"…"

"Anyway… that means Hye-Jin unni will eventually become the Queen of the Elf Kingdom later," Kim Ye-Ri said.

"I-I'm going to reject it," Jo Hye-Jin stuttered.

"…"

"Looks like we'll have to wait for the fourth proposal."

"…"

Based on her reaction, Elena seemed really disappointed.

Kim Ye-Ri was trying to feel her out—

'Oh, no, I think she still likes Kim Hyun-Sung.'

"If Hye-Jin noonim becomes the elf queen—" Park Deok-Gu said.

"No, I'm not," Jo Hye-Jin interrupted.

"I have a feeling she'll look good as the queen," Sun Hee-Young remarked.

"I won't look good at all," Jo Hye-Jin denied.

"It's like a story from a fairytale. A female knight rejecting the elf prince's proposal…" Sun Hee-Young added.

"That's not going to happen," Jo Hye-Jin retorted.

"I really hope it goes well," Sun Hee-Young said.

'It'd be great if nothing happens… '

I could see Jo Hye-Jin trying to deduce Kim Hyun-Sung's reaction while denying Sun Hee-Young's words. The sight made me think that perhaps there was still some kind

of spark between them.

Kim Hyun-Sung acted like he didn't care, but it was probably because he didn't have the luxury to worry about Jo Hye-Jin's problem as well.

"I don't want you to leave the guild, Miss Hye-Jin," I chimed in.

"I told you… I have no intention of leaving, Sub Guild Master," Jo Hye-Jin said.

"Don't you agree, Mr. Hyun-Sung?" I asked.

"Yes, he's right. You're a valuable member of the guild," Kim Hyun-Sung answered.

'I told you, noona. This coin still has the potential to bounce back.'

"Indeed, she's an important member of the guild. She needs to stay with us in the Blue Guild forever," Park Deok-Gu said.

"*Woof!"* Shiro barked in agreement.

"Please don't leave, Miss Jo Hye-Jin," Alps begged.

"I'm not going to go anywhere, Alps," Jo Hye-Jin told her.

It was stressful trying to respond to each and every one of them. To overcome the depressing mood earlier, some made some pretty mean jokes.

Jo Hye-Jin started blushing in the face of everyone's words, which was unlike her.

The sight seemed to be a brand-new sight for the new member of the guild, as she was in awe while staring at them.

If the guild members had been spending time with each other more often, she would have been able to see that side of Jo Hye-Jin often, but that wasn't the case at all. In Belier's eyes, Jo Hye-Jin was definitely an unfriendly and scary superior, but this scene definitely changed her thoughts about the latter even just a little.

We drank coffee and ate some snacks while talking about many different things. I wasn't sure whether we were having a meeting or just chatting, but it was really fun.

Kim Hyun-Sung also looked like he was enjoying himself… and Ha-Yan also looked like she wanted to maintain this lively atmosphere.

"*Hm…* I'm starting to get hungry."

Eating now seemed a bit too much, though.

The people outside would definitely think that we were having a serious conversation at this rate. It had been a while since the meeting had started, after all. They couldn't have imagined that we were talking about Jo Hye-Jin and Elias' love story.

Actually, we didn't have the luxury of time to chitchat like this.

"Come to think of it, when are we going to have dinner together? It's been a while since we went out to eat together," Park Deok-Gu asked.

"H-He's right. O-O-Oppa, it's been… a really long time…" Jung Ha-Yan stuttered.

'You're only saying that because you want to feed me wine.'

"We should also have a welcome party for the new guild member," Park Deok-Gu added.

"Then… I'll host the party," Sun Hee-Young volunteered.

"I-If… Hee-Young noonim is preparing the party… I welcome it anytime, but we should let someone else… do it…" Park Deok-Gu suggested.

I liked the way Sun Hee-Young hosted parties. Her parties were quiet and classy, but I saw the others nodding in agreement with Park Deok-Gu.

"*Woof!*" Shiro barked in agreement as well.

"How about you host the party, Alps?" Jo Hye-Jin suggested.

"What? M-Me?" Alps asked.

'I don't think she's any better. What if she hosts a pet party? She's obviously never hosted a party before based on how she looks like a nerd.'

“I’ll do my best!” Alps shouted.

“*Woof! Woof! Woof!*”

'No, don’t do it.'

“Or I can do it as well. The great Park Deok-Gu…” Park Deok-Gu volunteered.

'No, you’re even worse.'

“I think… Miss Jung Ha-Yan wants to do it," Han Sora chimed in.

Jung Ha-Yan nodded immediately. If Jung Ha-Yan ended up hosting the party, Han Sora would be the one who'd become busy, so it was fine. However, I was afraid that a life-size statue of me would appear at the party, so I couldn’t approve of the suggestion.

“Let’s go big and open a festival instead of hosting a party! You know that bag festival Hyun-Sung bro had opened last time? We got a really good reaction from that,” Park Deok-Gu suggested.

“We’ll have to ask each guild for their cooperation… We don’t really have a lot of time, but we can do it if we push for it,” Hwang Jung-Yeon informed.

“A picnic. What do you think? Last time. We all. Went to. Mirror Lake,” Kim Ye-Ri suggested.

'It sounds like Ye-Ri wants to play.'

“Or how about we go sea fishing? It’ll be like a pep rally,” Ahn Ki-Mo suggested.

“It’s been a while since Ki-Mo bro made a good suggestion,” Park Deok-Gu commented.

“Should I craft a few special fishing rods?” Yoo Ah-Young asked.

'That sounds like a waste of talent.'

Everyone suggested something except for Lee Chang-Ryeol, who was never really the talkative type.

Their voices got louder and louder, and they'd laugh every time the pig made a ridiculous comment.

I tried to hold back my laughter, but I couldn’t do it because he kept making ridiculous comments.

‘Damn it.’

“Make special baits, not special fishing rods!”

‘Ah, I don’t know why that keeps making me laugh.’

“I’m sorry. I can’t… make that…” Yoo Ah-Young said.

“It’s been a while since I’ve seen you laugh like that, Mr. Ki-Young,” Kim Hyun-Sung said quietly.

‘Really? I think I’ve been laughing a lot.’

“Really?” I asked.

“Yes,” Kim Hyun-Sung answered.

“It’s because we’re all together,” I told him.

“…”

“…”

“I see,” Kim Hyun-Sung said.

'I feel like he likes it more than I do. You think you can fool me? I know you’re enjoying this.'

“O-Oppa, w-w-we should take Sera as well,” Jung Ha-Yan suggested.

“Of course, we should,” I said.

'But have you two been doing well?'

I presumed that was the case, as Ha-Yan looked happy at the mention of Sera.

I wondered if Thro and the others were doing well, too.

“But…” Park Deok-Gu paused.

“*Hm*?”

“The festival, picnic, pep rally, and party… W-When are we doing all of that?” Park Deok-Gu asked.

"After we're done clearing this dungeon,” I replied.

“W-What?!”

The room abruptly became silent.

‘Ah, shit. My timing was bad. I should've built up for it or hinted at it first before saying it.'

The atmosphere was great just a few moments ago, but the air between us suddenly became kind of awkward.

They weren’t scared of going into dungeons, nor were they shocked about the sudden news because they knew the reason behind today's meeting.

The problem was that everyone was worried about me.

Kim Hyun-Sung was staring at me in disbelief.

‘I’m not going to sacrifice myself in the dungeon, so don’t worry too much.’

“Guild Master,” I said.

“I won’t allow it,” Kim Hyun-Sung said.

'How dare you block my path.'

“There’s no reason for you to enter the dungeon, Mr. Ki-Young. The dungeon inside the Vatican is probably being cleared right now, and many guilds, including the Blue

Guild, are already preparing a raid party. I'm sure we'll hear good news soon," Kim Hyun-Sung said to me.

"Y-You should get some rest. We'll—"

'No, I can't trust you guys.'

"I'll go with you," I interrupted.

"I won't allow it," Kim Hyun-Sung argued.

"I'm going with you," I repeated.

"Mr. Ki-Young!" Kim Hyun-Sung shouted.

'Don't raise your voice, damn it. I just need to say one thing, and it'll be over.'

"I don't want to be alone."

'Where do you think I'll be the safest?'

"I want to be with the members of the Blue Guild," I requested.

The room became quiet again as if everyone was at a loss for words.

'Answer me. Where do you think I'll be the safest?'

If all of you guys enter the dungeon, who will comfort me? Who will protect me?

I looked happy, and I even had the capacity to sympathize and comfort Templar Gen, but I still felt pretty shaken by that incident.

Sometimes, I'd have nightmares, and there were times when I couldn't sleep at all. I'd flinch at the smallest sound and tremble in fear, afraid that someone was going to hit me.

I had nothing left but the guild members. My family members here were the only ones who could support me. If Kim Hyun-Sung and Jung Ha-Yan were to enter the dungeon without me, what would I do? Who would stay with me?

“I feel the safest with you guys, so…” I trailed off.

“…”

“So I’m going, too,” I continued.

There was no way he'd keep arguing against me after hearing that.

As expected, Kim Hyun-Sung's face became solemn, and some of them looked like they were feeling guilty.

How could they just leave me alone?

In fact, they had been neglecting me recently, and I assumed it was because they were busy with guild work?

Some of them seemed to have remembered the fact that I had spent a long time up there where it was dark and empty… I was talking about my time upstairs. I had extended my hand toward the continent, but I just couldn't reach it, as I was dead.

My time with Gen made me remember those dark times.

I had been missing the Blue Guild, and I had been missing spending time with you guys.

The only time the honorary cardinal—overwhelmed and busy with numerous tasks and responsibilities—could be Lee Ki-Young was whenever he was with you guys.

'I don’t want to be apart from you guys any longer. Can't you guys feel my true feelings? Can't you guys feel my sincerity?'

“I don’t want to be apart from you guys any longer,” I said.

“O-O-Oppa…” Jung Ha-Yan stuttered.

'That’s right, Ha-Yan. I don’t want to be apart from you.'

“Hyung-nim…” Park Deok-Gu muttered.

'Deok-Gu, I’m really tired.'

"…"

'Hye-Jin, my friend. You're going to continue being by my side, right? You're not going to marry that old elf, right?'

"Mr. Lee Ki-Young."

'Yes, Miss Elena. Please stay with me.'

"M-Mr. Ki-Young."

'Yes, Mr. Hyun-Sung. Don't leave me alone anymore.'

I looked at everyone with tearful eyes.

'Don't leave me alone, everyone. Don't leave me. Don't leave Lee Ki-Young alone.'

CHAPTER 952
MOOD (3)

I would be safer with them, and it was a fact that the people who had spent time with me would agree on.

Leaving me alone was like leaving a child close to a body of water.

The world was always cruel to me, and I was always under threat.

There were many reasons behind their malice, such as personal greed, political reasons, or they were simply evil. I was always the victim, but I was always forgiving and understanding.

There was no way Kim Hyun-Sung would give this task to a member of the Blue Guild.

Lee Chang-Ryeol and Park Lian had already made a big mistake, so I was sure that no bodyguard would satisfy him at this rate. I assumed that Jung Ha-Yan and him were thinking that no one else could take on that important task except for them, but they couldn't stay by my side.

'After all, who will enter the dungeon if not the continent's best mage and swordsman?'

Kim Hyun-Sung could afford not to go, but I couldn't imagine Jung Ha-Yan missing out on an expedition like this. Even Park Deok-Gu, who could be used as our backup plan, had to go. Even if he were forced to stay to protect me, I was sure those two would still be worried about me, as the pig was only good at being a meatshield.

'Game over.'

'I decided to make eye contact with each and every person so that they'll think that they shouldn't leave me alone no matter what.'

As expected, I noticed a strong resolve in Elena's eyes.

It was the same for Jung Ha-Yan and Park Deok-Gu. I tried to focus a bit more…

'But I should stop here… '

I felt like I'd end up being the bad guy if I were to keep this up.

It was effective, so I had to stop here.

The mood was already set as well.

"The sub guild master's safety… is the most important," Jo Hye-Jin said.

"We can just make you stay in your room, and then we can… seal it with spells and enhancements. No one will be able to barge into your room then," Kim Hyun-Sung suggested.

I got worried for a second, but I smiled after hearing Jung Ha-Yan's words.

"It can't be helped… W-W-What if I stay behind?" Jung Ha-Yan asked.

"You're a key member of dungeon raids," Kim Hyun-Sung said.

"…"

"I think it would be better if I stay behind," Kim Hyun-Sung added.

'They're all trying to stay behind.'

"If our hyung-nim is going to stay behind…" Park Deok-Gu trailed off.

Facing the Templars would become more difficult.

"But we can't have a separate group of guards. This is no ordinary dungeon, so we need as many people to participate in the raid," Kim Hyun-Sung said.

"How about we let the Order stay with him?" Jo Hye-Jin suggested.

"I won't allow it," Kim Hyun-Sung responded. We did that, and it resulted in bloodshed, so the only option they had was the Red Mercenary Guild, but it was no easy task either.

“N-N-Not that,” Jung Ha-Yan stuttered.

Ha-Yan would oppose it and…

“Miss Cha Hee-Ra has declared her participation in the expedition,” Jo Hye-Jin informed.

Hee-Ra noona wouldn’t miss out on an event like this. She was never really the type of person to just stand around, and it was time for her to start moving again, so there was no way she was going to be absent.

Without Cha Hee-Ra there, it'd be meaningless to go to the Red Mercenary Guild.

“Looks like I have no choice but to go with you,” I said. It was the only option left. No adult would want to leave me near the water. What if I ended up falling into the water?

'Are you guys just going to let me drown?'

The room became silent, and they all looked at me quietly. It was amusing how they were exchanging glances upon realizing that there was only one option.

Kim Hyun-Sung sighed deeply and said, “Your safety is more important than clearing the dungeon.”

'Really?'

“Your safety will be the top priority, so we’ll form three escort groups. I’ll be in the first group, Miss Ha-Yan will be in the second group, and I’ll ask the Red Mercenary Group’s cooperation for the third group,” Kim Hyun-Sung announced.

'So it’ll be Hee-Ra noona… '

“The members of each group will be announced later,” Kim Hyun-Sung informed.

“Okay.”

“Understood, Master.”

“Miss Sun Hee-Young,” Kim Hyun-Sung called out.

“Yes?”

“Please reconfirm the supplies,” Kim Hyun-Sung ordered.

“Okay,” Sun Hee-Young answered.

‘Looks like the guild staffers will be the ones suffering.’

I was joining the expedition, so more supplies were necessary. They’d have to carry glamping items instead of simple tents and Mirror Salmon instead of combat ration. I'd expect nothing less than that.

'Carry a lot of supplies, guys. I don’t like being hungry.'

“Miss Hye-Jin,” Kim Hyun-Sung called out.

“Yes?”

“Please select a trustworthy guild,” Kim Hyun-Sung requested.

“Yes, sir,” Jo Hye-Jin replied.

It seemed that some of the people who were supposed to join the raid would end up scoring me instead. It wasn’t that bad, but they seemed to be focusing less and less on clearing the dungeon, which made me think that my absence would be more helpful to the dungeon conquest.

Everyone immediately got busy with their own tasks.

At this point, I had to say something because I had to let them know what was important.

“Now that things have been decided, I should invite the guest.”

“What?”

“Come in,” I said.

‘They've been waiting for quite a while outside.’

The Outer God children entered the hall.

“Oh my,” Hwang Jung-Yeon exclaimed.

They were the top contributors and were the ones who found the dungeon inside the Vatican.

They looked pretty cute when they came in, but they didn’t look so good.

I was sure they knew what had been going on through word of mouth.

Actually, there was a chance that they had no idea, but it didn't seem to be the case, as they looked really relieved upon seeing that I was safe. Cheru and Sera, who had yet to be punished, looked kind of nervous.

I saw Jung Ha-Yan waving at Sera.

Unlike them, Kim Hyun-Sung and Thro didn’t even look at each other.

‘I think there’s some kind of issue between them.’

“C-Can we start, Father?” Domi asked.

‘Go ahead, cute Domi.’

“Okay, then I’ll go straight to the point and explain briefly about the dungeon,” Domi said.

“…”

“The location of the dungeon was discovered fourteen hours ago. Using the energy signature of the unique energy that Mr. Rafael's party has been investigating, we managed to find another place emitting the same type of energy. It's coming from an abandoned temple, and the door leading to its basement was discovered in a public library within five hundred meters of the temple," Domi said.

‘Dominions is good at talking.’

“The trick to opening the door was quite simple—one just has to remove a certain book, but the door only opens to those possessing the holy power of the Order, so…

we couldn't continue our investigation.

"We discovered that the basement has a total of 148 floors, and the entrance to the dungeon is located approximately 2,430 meters below ground. What you're seeing right now is the dungeon entrance," she explained.

An extremely large door appeared on the Goddess' Mirror.

The massive door was bigger than the doors to any temple, and I saw several religious carvings on the door. The carvings depicted angels, gods, and demons, which made it hard to identify. One thing I was sure of was that it gave off a really negative energy.

I could see war, greed, murder, people pointing their swords at each other, and demons devouring humans.

'Who are they?'

Perhaps I could find Belial among the carvings. I looked around, but I couldn't see him.

However, the figure carved at the very bottom of the door was unmistakable.

'It's Benigoa.'

Benigoa seemed to be praying with her eyes closed and hands clasped together.

The carvings above her depicted chaos, so it seemed like she was praying for them.

It was like she was praying to stop the war, to stop the famine, and to stop the demon invasion. She seemed like she was praying for the denizens of the continent.

I had no idea what happened, but it wasn't that hard for me to come up with many assumptions. It was cliched, after all. I assumed she was locked up underground and was being used as a factory of holy power.

Of course, there was also a high chance that she was stuck between a rock and a hard place.

'Still, locking her up 184 floors underground is a bit harsh.'

'Shit, maybe I shouldn't have offered to go. How am I going to climb down all those stairs? Maybe Deok-Gu will carry me, or Ha-Yan will make me weightless.'

Anyway, walking wasn't a good choice.

While I was getting worried about how I was going to traverse so many steps, Sera started talking to the others.

I was kind of puzzled, but…

'He's trying to be the top contributor of this presentation.'

I instantly understood what these children were trying to do here.

They knew that I disliked him, so they were trying to gather all of their achievements and give them to him. This wasn't just a presentation. They also wanted to show us Sera's contributions.

Domi did the first presentation, as she made the biggest contribution.

Honestly, I wasn't convinced that Seraphim had done well, so his siblings were definitely being considerate here.

"I-I'll explain the n-next part. While Mr. Rafael's party was heading toward the dungeon, seven skirmishes erupted, and their opponents were all humans. T-the H-H-Holy Knights of the Vatican have occupied the p-path that leads to the dungeon entrance," Sera explained.

Jung Ha-Yan was smiling at the sight. She seemed proud of his contribution and the fact that he was in the middle of a public presentation. I couldn't really hear him because he spoke quietly and was stuttering, I understood what he was trying to say.

"T-t-the name of the dungeon is the Mole Saint's Cozy Sanctuary. A-as all of you have heard by now, this dungeon is unranked, but experts have determined this is at least a Legendary dungeon," Sera added.

I wanted to throw a pen at him so that he'd speak properly, but I had to hold it in.

"Mr. Rafael's party has entered the dungeon, and we're receiving news through the rangers. H-His party believes this dungeon is the largest dungeon to have ever

existed, and we confirmed that t-there's no limit to the number of people who can enter the dungeon. W-We're planning on dispatching up to ten thousand people—"

"Ten thousand p-people?" Jung Ha-Yan interrupted.

"Y-Yes, Moth—I mean, Mot—I mean, Miss Jung Ha-Yan. We confirmed that there are at least three floors below the dungeon entrance," Sera replied.

"I-I see. T-Thank you for that information, Investigator S-Sera," Jung Ha-Yan said.

"S-Sure. Thank you, Moth—I mean, Miss Jung Ha-Yan," he stuttered.

I knew the dungeon was going to be massive, as the Vatican itself was as big as a city.

If I assumed that the Mole Saint had been digging beneath such a vast space, a small party would be useless in the dungeon. It seemed like Rafael's party had explored up to the third basement level, but there was no way they'd be able to do a proper investigation.

We needed a lot more people to do a proper investigation.

The dungeon was absolutely massive, after all.

'A war event might erupt.'

There was no guarantee that a huge battle would occur just because the dungeon was big, but…

'It's worth considering for this expedition.'

"The first strike squad includes the Black Swan Guild, along with a few powerful guilds from the Republic. T-these are the monsters that we found so far… a-and their samples—"

"Let's do that later," I interrupted.

"*Ah*, o-okay," Sera replied.

Thro looked kind of disappointed, so I assumed the monsters were part of his presentation. I felt kind of bad for him now.

“T-That’s all,” Sera said.

Jung Ha-Yan was already clapping before Sera could conclude his presentation. Once the presentation was over, everyone clapped, including Han Sora.

“You did well,” Jung Ha-Yan told him.

Sera looked really nervous.

‘He annoys me for some reason.’

Sera looked relieved upon seeing Jung Ha-Yan's nod.

‘He really annoys me.’

Still, I needed to be nice to him because Ha-Yan was watching.

“You've improved, Sera. I’m proud of you,” I said.

‘Gosh, I really want to beat him up. One mistake and you’re dead.’

Jung Ha-Yan looked relieved upon seeing my reaction

“We’ll leave in three hours. Until then, prepare for the expedition and be on standby afterward. I’ll personally take the lead on behalf of the busy guild master,” I said.

“Ki-Young…”

‘Shut up, Kim Hyun-Sung. I’m going to do it, damn it. I need to do this to feel satisfied.’

“Please tell all the groups and adventurers participating in the expedition that I’ll personally form the groups except for the first strike squad,” I instructed.

No one argued.

‘Yeah, now you guys know that three hours is enough.’

“Additionally, I’m going to add basic siege weapons, including magic cannons, to the list of supplies. Miss Ah-Young, please join the supply group along with the dwarf engineers,” I ordered.

“Yes, sir,” Yoo Ah-Young answered. She didn’t even ask why we were taking a siege weapon with us.

‘I like this.’

Their pitying gaze became full of faith, as they knew that listening to me would only be advantageous to them.

I actually didn't have to give them the look of "please don't abandon me…”

‘Stop staring at me.’

After all, these baby chicks of the Blue Guild still needed me.

“What are you guys doing? Move,” I ordered.

CHAPTER 953
MOOD (4)

'Busy, busy, and busy… '

Ten thousand people were going to participate in the expedition.

It could be said that the continent's best forces were going to join the expedition.

The three major guilds of Lindel, the great generals of the Republic, the famous adventurers of the Union of Kingdoms the Federation, the knights of the Sacred Democratic Country, and the priests of the Vatican.

Every adventurer and their respective party had their own unique traits, personalities, and skills, so it was difficult to organize a raid with so many people. If these people were members of an armed force that had been training in one place, the situation would be different, but that wasn't the case at all.

Since there were so many people to manage, even creating the strike squad was incredibly difficult. Fortunately, no idiot had gone ahead and asked why the strike squad was important.

In addition, every single guild and party had their own way of handling their administrative tasks, which was incredibly helpful in our current situation.

It had been a while since I joined a dungeon raid, but I was sure we could complete the quest without that many issues. My Mind's Eye and Telescope were super strong, after all. Of course, my genius brain and cool-headed mindset were even more powerful.

I was also a dignified and charismatic leader.

If I had to nitpick, I'd say that the administrative staffers of the guild and parties weren't looking fondly at me. To be exact, they looked nervous.

"This is the next one, Father Lee Ki-Young. It's selecting people for the fourth strike

squad."

"Please leave it there, and my title from now on is Strike Squad Operations Commander," I ordered.

"Yes, sir."

Perhaps it was because the majority of them were young, but they looked nervous about my arrangements.

I understood their feelings, as it had been a while since I joined a dungeon raid. Of course, my strong symbolic image had to be one of the reasons they were nervous as well.

They probably thought I was crazy when I suddenly told them that I'd remake the strike squads in just three hours. After all, everyone here was a genius considered to be elite among their peers.

'But guys, did you know that… '

—that I was the one who started the control tower boom?

I was the reason the higher-ups of basically every single organization out there had decided to invest in these guys.

The continent had no system in place when it came to raids prior to my arrival here.

'Why do you think your bosses sent you guys to me? They want you guys to obtain some experience and learn something from me, so you shouldn't be talking behind my back like that.'

"He said he's going to change the strike squad, but I think he's working on the fourth strike squad right now."

"We don't have enough time to change anything. The strike squad members are going to get confused at this rate. Are you sure you told him the details about the raid?"

"Yes, I told him the details, but he suspended the operations of the first strike squad, and he's about to change them as well."

“Why is he doing this… What the hell is the guild master…”

“I don’t understand any of this… why is he reforming the strike squads? Why the hell is he interfering with our system?”

‘You guys don’t understand my plan because you guys are idiots, and I can hear everything you guys are talking about, you know?’

“From what I heard, useless supplies have been coming in since Father Lee Ki-Young announced that he was going to participate in the raid. They’re basically sending in luxury items.”

“Expensive food including Mirror Salmon… Rainbow Cotton Candy for dessert… *Ha.* Even a chef specializing in creating cotton candy was enlisted as an expedition member. Premium glamping kit, a sleeping mattress, and ornately designed uniforms…”

"Does he not know that this isn't a playground?"

“I think this is all a political play. Perhaps the Vatican and the Sacred Democratic Country have joined forces to pressure everyone.

"Raiding a dungeon with Father Lee Ki-Young as the commander… Is that even a reasonable decision?

"We can surely handle a dungeon without him. If I were in their position, I wouldn't make the same decision as them. The problem is that this isn’t an ordinary dungeon. If we think of it as an ordinary dungeon, we’re going to suffer.”

'Yeah, that makes sense.'

“Do you think he’ll get it done in time? There isn’t much time left until the expedition… What did he mean by dispatching a separate siege unit… There are so many changes…”

“All we need to do is follow his orders.”

“What?”

Fortunately, some of them had a brain. I took a closer look at the one who chimed in

and realized that she appeared familiar to me. I couldn't remember her name, and I had no idea where we fought together, but I presumed that she was once an adjutant.

The large glasses that covered half of her face, her short hair, and her soft manner of speech were really familiar to me.

“Keep in mind that he’s the honorary cardinal and the former sub guild master of the Blue Guild.”

“I know that, but…”

“Back then, the Blue Guild was on the brink of collapse, and it wasn't strange if the guild had simply disappeared at the time. You guys honestly don't believe that… the guild master’s power alone was enough to grow the guild, do you?”

“…”

“The Blue Guild was extremely short on manpower at the time, so the sub guild master had no choice but to take care of a variety of administrative tasks.”

‘Yeah, I remember. Kim Hyun-Sung, that evil bastard.’

'I can still remember how I had to work tirelessly like a dog upon being declared the sub guild master.'

“The sub guild master is the reason why the Blue Guild is at its current heights. I’m not simping over him. He actually did it. Remember the textbooks you guys are using to study? Where do you think they come from?”

“That’s…”

“Do you guys still not know… how the textbook that contains information about the Continental War, the Day of Destruction, and the big and small wars were created?”

“…”

“They weren't made because everyone idolized him. The tactics that were employed during those wars were direct orders from him… The administrative tasks, tactics, strategy, supplies, and personnels were all decided by him.

"He and Miss Lee Ji-Hye did them all together, and I was their assistant."

“Really? That’s… so absurd…”

It was kind of exaggerated. However, I had to admit that she was pretty competent and was of great help to me at the time.

“If that’s true, then there’s no reason for him to create a separate command tower—”

“Don’t think about it.”

“What?”

“I suggest you get rid of any opinions or doubts you have in your mind. We’ve become components of his plan. You’re not here to brainstorm. Think of yourselves as being the hands and feet of the sub guild master and the cogwheel that executes his plan. It may not make sense, but trust me. You do that, and you’ll obtain something after all this.”

It felt good to know that someone was defending me.

‘Her name is Floretta. She must be from the Union of Kingdoms.’

It seemed that she had been enjoying a good position since then. I could see it from her outfit and her overall demeanor.

However, she really was exaggerating, as I never thought of the staffers as my hands and feet. As expected, some of them glanced at me. The majority of them still couldn’t believe it, and I was bothered by them. The impact didn't really diminish, as I really liked receiving attention, but their gaze felt burdensome.

I was now afraid of not being able to meet their expectations.

The simulation that I was running in my head in real-time told me that the satisfaction rate was seventy-six percent, which was pretty high.

‘Not to brag, but I made that, too, guys.’

They were looking forward to seeing what else they could do here to achieve even better results.

Floretta nodded as if she was telling them to trust her.

'It's honestly not a hard task.'

I had data from the dummy world, Mind's Eye, and the Telescope, so it was like solving a slightly difficult puzzle. Yeah, it was just that.

I simply ran the program that matched the dummy world data using my personal account on the Goddess' Hand Mirror. I updated the variables tied to the named characters and double-checked those variables against the information that I could see from Mind's Eye.

I would then update the data if there were any discrepancies.

The program sorted people into their own groups, and grouping them into strike squads made me feel like a marriage agency matching couples for life

'That's just an example.'

It was a lot more elaborate than that.

The program would create parties and groups by ensuring that the members' styles, stats, battle records, and individual characteristics were compatible with each other.

In other words, everything was automated.

Although I had to change some things here and there, it wasn't really a big issue.

I needed to put on a performance, as these administrative rookies were looking at me as if I were a fool. Getting a nosebleed would be pretty dramatic, but it'd make me look like I was focusing at the very least. They'd be touched if I did that, too.

'Ah, damn it. I got dust in my eyes.'

The satisfaction rate was going to the moon. Seventy-seven percent. Seventy-eight percent.

My hands danced across the keyboard as I pretended like I was busy. I took a sip of my coffee and returned to typing when I heard familiar footsteps behind me. The footsteps were from Floretta, a senior member of this command center.

“Check the supplies one last time and report back to me afterward. The Blue Guild said that they’re done with the preparations,” I ordered without looking away from the screen.

I got dust in my eyes, but I endured it and focused on the Goddess’ Mirror.

“Is it all done?” I asked.

— Yes, Mr. Ki-Young. I’ve completed everything you asked me to do.

“Wait, Mr. Hyun-Sung. I sent someone over there right now,” I informed him.

— M-Mr. Ki-Young… you don’t have to overdo it.

“I’m not overdoing it, so don’t worry,” I told him.

I had him on speaker, so I had to hang up before he said something strange.

Seventy-nine percent. Eighty percent. The satisfaction rate rose to a decent percentage, so I felt like I was finally free.

I thought about which task I had to complete at the same time as what I was doing right now, but I found no more tasks to handle.

What would happen if I included the field commanders in my calculations?

Eighty-one percent…

Nice…

Eighty-two percent…

I noticed people whispering with each other while glancing at me. They looked like they had realized that something indescribably was happening before their eyes.

“What in the world…”

“That doesn't make any sense…”

'That's what they said, but this does *make sense, you idiots.'*

“Mr. Lee Ki-Young, I heard you called for me?” Kasugano Yuno asked.

“It’s been a while, Miss Yuno,” I greeted.

It was Kasugano Yuno, my special guest. However, we could just catch up later, as I was still too *busy*.

“I want you to help me minimize the variables as much as possible,” I requested.

“Yes, sir,” Kasugano Yuno answered. It wasn't exactly that detailed, but she could see the future, and there was nothing better than that.

Eighty-four percent. Eighty-five percent.

'I don’t want to put Elias and Jo Hye-Jin on the same squad… but they’re so compatible with each other. Is there something wrong with the program?'

Eighty-nine percent.

The satisfaction rate was now ninety percent.

I saw the idiots casting envious looks at me. Actually, they were staring at me as if they were looking at a monster. However, they'd definitely be more shocked once they saw tactical Kim Hyun-Sung. This was nothing compared to him.

Since this was such a big dungeon, there was a chance that I had to deploy him.

“Let’s get ready to head out. The second and third strike squad will enter the dungeon first,” I ordered.

“Y-Yes, sir.”

Ninety-eight percent…

At this point, ninety-eight percent made me feel a bit disappointed.

I didn't really want to do this, but I decided to put Elias and Jo Hye-Jin in the same squad.

99.1 percent. It was minus 0.9 percent, but the data from the dummy world was kind

of exaggerated, so I had to take this with a grain of salt.

“The command center will head in together with the guards and the seventh strike squad,” I added.

I was sure I looked like a genius to them.

‘I feel the same way.’

There was only one thing I was worried about, and it was about how we were going to go down to the lower levels, but…

‘These guys… they actually prepared a palanquin?’

“Get in, Mr. Ki-Young.”

I nodded upon seeing an ornately designed palanquin.

CHAPTER 954
MOOD (5)

It looked like a king had arrived. Obviously, the control tower was important, but I thought this was a bit excessive. There weren't any religious events and we weren't visiting another nation. We were going on an expedition to clear a dungeon, so an entire strike squad as my guards wasn't exactly ideal.

The experience and size of the guards surrounding the palanquin were double the strike squad that had entered the dungeon first, so it wasn't strange for people to say that I was heading to the dungeon to have a picnic rather than conquer it.

The palanquin was unnecessarily luxurious, and it was surrounded by holy knights and members of the Blue Guild.

There were a total of four people carrying the palanquin, and they were sweating a lot.

They were mediocre adventurers when it came to stats, but they were pretty skillful.

The palanquin was so comfortable that I wondered whether they were professionals at carrying a palanquin. The interior of the palanquin was fancy as well. It had been expanded using a variety of spells, so there was a bed, sofa, table, and of course, there was a small kitchen. The inside was big enough to accommodate four people, and I couldn't help but sympathize with the people carrying such a heavy palanquin.

'These guys… '

They looked really nervous. It was like they were threatened that their entire family would get wiped out if they ended up making a mistake and dropping the palanquin.

The dungeon was cold, but they were sweating a lot, so anyone could see that there was something wrong here.

'I feel bad… '

I felt bad about them, as I was feeling really comfortable.

Just then, I heard someone sipping their tea.

“Mr. Lee Ki-Young, would you like to have another cup?” Kasugano Yuno asked.

“I’d appreciate that, Miss Yuno,” I replied.

“I’m so happy to see you after such a long time.”

Hearing her say that while pouring me another cup of tea made me think that it really had been a long time since I saw her.

We had been messaging each other, but we were working in different regions, so we hadn't really been able to meet each other. Kasugano Yuno was the actual ruler of Celia, so she had many affairs to handle every day.

“I can’t remember the last time I was on break…” Kasugano Yuno remarked.

‘We’re not on break right now, though. We’re going on an expedition.’

“Do you remember? In the Dark World…” Kasugano Yuno trailed off.

I honestly couldn't remember what she was talking about, but I nodded to make her happy.

“It’s been a while since we went on an expedition together… Being with you is so surreal that it feels like a dream, Master—I mean, Mr. Lee Ki-Young. This moment is so precious to me…” Kasugano Yuno said.

“…”

“*Ah!* C-Come to think of it, Mr. Lee Ki-Young…” Kasugano Yuno paused.

“Yes?”

“I heard that silver-haired child doesn’t have a guardian yet,” Kasugano Yuno said.

'Hyun-Sung is the guardian now… '

“I heard that Thro is rejecting his guardian… Would it be okay if I talked to him?” Kasugano Yuno asked.

“T-T-Thro’s guardian is Hyun-Sung oppa… r-right, Sora?” Jung Ha-Yan mumbled.

“T-Thro needs to learn swordsmanship, so H-Hyun-Sung oppa has to be his guardian. B-Besides swordsmanship, h-he’s learning other things, too, so his guardian has to be Hyun-Sung oppa,” Jung Ha-Yan added.

She was right.

Now that I thought about it, there was a time when she was desperately trying to get rid of her, but it no longer seemed to be the case.

Jung Ha-Yan's self-esteem was exponentially higher than when I first met her, so she no longer seemed interested in Kasugano Yuno. In her eyes, Kasugano Yuno was just a foreigner who'd visit Lindel sometimes.

We would barely meet, so Jung Ha-Yan's reaction was understandable.

Moreover, Kasugano Yuno wasn't a guardian of one of those Outer Gods, so Jung Ha-Yan definitely felt that she was in a different position from the former.

What was also amusing was that Kasugano Yuno didn’t seem to be interested in Jung Ha-Yan, either.

There wasn’t a special reason for it. Kasugano Yuno simply remembered Jung Ha-Yan as nothing more than a chess piece in her first life. Kasugano Yuno didn't make it obvious, as she wasn't that kind of person, but I noticed she'd sometimes look at Jung Ha-Yan as if the latter was pitiful.

“Miss Jung Ha-Yan, you should mention Sera as well,” Han Sora told her.

“*Ah*, right. O-Oppa, I-I’ve been thinking about many things. It’s regarding Sera’s education…” Jung Ha-Yan said.

“Okay.”

“T-They say that a social life is important,” Jung Ha-Yan added.

'Really? I'm glad you know that.'

"O-Of course, I know that Sera is getting along with his other friends, b-but I think it would be good if he went to school… I-I think he's kind of lacking in the social department…" Jung Ha-Yan suggested.

"Let's take our time thinking about it. I think it's best if we ask Sera's opinion after the expedition," I suggested.

Kasugano Yuno quietly left. For some reason, I pitied her, so I felt uncomfortable to see her leave just like that.

And that was when I heard knocking on the window…

'What a relief.'

"Mr. Ki-Young?"

"Yes, Mr. Hyun-Sung," I answered.

"Is everything okay in there?" he asked.

"Yes, of course," I replied.

"I'm sure it's stuffy and tiresome being in there… How about we take a short break?" Kim Hyun-Sung suggested.

'Can you not say that out loud? What will the people around us think about our conversation? I'm just drinking tea in here, so who do you think is more tired?

'Is it these people walking underground or someone like me who's been doing nothing but drink tea since the start of the expedition?

'In addition, the people carrying this palanquin are drenched in sweat, so why are you even saying that?'

"…"

"You look really tired. We'll take a quick break," Kim Hyun-Sung said.

'Ah, they'll start talking behind my back again. I know you're just going to set up camp.'

I was sure that no one wanted to take a break here, as there were many things they had to do each time a break was announced.

"We'll take a break," Kim Hyun-Sung announced.

"Yes, sir."

The officers nodded, but they didn't look happy.

As expected, I heard the adventurers sighing among themselves.

"Damn it…"

"This is so fuckin' annoying."

"We can't even complain. What the hell are we doing here? Are we here to clear the dungeon, or are we here on a picnic? We haven't even entered the dungeon yet…"

"Let's set up camp. Hurry up and move!"

"Yeah, yeah."

'Shit, maybe I shouldn't have come here.'

These people were first-class adventurers. They were people with a lot of influence in their own guilds or organizations, so it felt pretty awkward to order them around. The good thing was that they were pretty obedient, and the youngest members of their team were already busy setting up camp.

The members of the mercenary group known as the Halberds of Execution were hammering nails into the ground while a famous mage with the title—Mage of Scorching Heat—was busy with the bonfire.

The way everyone was moving busily was pretty absurd, and I could hear sighs everywhere.

"Damn it… this is why I didn't want to be in this strike squad…"

Despite saying that, he still joined the strike squad.

“There are too many rocks on the ground,” Kim Hyun-Sung said.

“We’ll take care of them,” an adventurer said.

With that one comment, everyone got moving, pushing away the rocks on the ground.

'Did they imagine that I might trip on a rock and fall to the ground? Well, the rocks have to be cleared, as it's uncomfortable to sit on rocks.'

“Please maintain strict hygiene,” Kim Hyun-Sung ordered.

“Yes, sir.”

“Please wait a moment, Mr. Ki-Young,” Kim Hyun-Sung said.

Only the people tasked with carrying the palanquin were happy. Their limits were being tested physically until now, so they all sprawled out on the ground once the palanquin was on the ground. It felt like they were staring at the palanquin in a daze.

“I’m heading out,” I said.

‘How is this even possible?’

I was astonished to see that they managed to set up camp in such a short period of time.

I looked around and saw people looking at me with resentment, which was within my expectations. They had probably realized that I was the reason behind all this. Their gaze was telling me that they wouldn't have to suffer like this if I had just stayed put outside.

For now, I had to act like I wasn’t feeling well because if I did that, they’d be less dissatisfied with the current situation.

The long journey had exhausted Father Lee Ki-Young, but he had forced himself to participate in the raid despite being ill.

He was truly a saint.

“Mr. Ki-Young, are you okay? I knew it… you’re not feeling well…” Kim Hyun-Sung said.

“I’m fine. Everyone is tired… so I’ll try to hold out as much as I can,” I replied.

I smiled weakly as if I were going to collapse at any moment. As always, my plan was to emphasize my perseverance. I also needed to encourage the guild members while visiting the resting members of the strike squad.

I was worried about Kim Hyun-Sung following me, but Jung Ha-Yan ran up to me and ended up taking Kim Hyun-Sung away with her.

I wasn’t sure what they were talking about, but it seemed serious.

I walked away with Kasugano Yuno standing behind me, and I saw the strike squad members resting comfortably.

“Do you mind if I join you?” I asked.

“Ah! M-Mr. Lee Ki-Young.”

I shook their hands like a politician and smiled at them while making eye contact.

'I’m Lee Ki-Young, Candidate Number One. Please don’t forget about me.'

“You’ve all come here for the continent's sake, so I really don’t know how to thank you…” I muttered.

“We’re just doing our jobs, Father Lee Ki-Young. I-I don’t know how to respond…”

“Thank you. Thank you, Father Lee Ki-Young.”

“If you feel uncomfortable or if you have any suggestions during the expedition… feel free to let me know,” I told them.

“We're not uncomfortable at all.”

“I’m glad to hear that,” I said.

I also needed to comfort the people carrying the palanquin. They looked like they had gotten a tan, and it proved to me that they had been carrying the palanquin all this while.

I grabbed their hands and stared deeply at them.

“Father Lee Ki-Young?”

“I’m sorry for causing you so much trouble,” I said.

“Why are you…”

It was because the Saint of Light was fair to everyone, even to those outsiders…

“It would’ve been nice if I could walk by myself… This is all I can offer,” I told them.

I offered them a chest filled with a luxurious potion set.

I was sure there was a fatigue recovery potion in there. The entire set was *really* expensive, after all.

“You don’t need to do this, Father Lee Ki-Young… We—”

“I know very well… how exhausted all of you are. Please take it,” I interrupted them.

“But…”

“Please think of it as me expressing my gratitude,” I added.

“In that case… we’ll gladly accept.”

“Also… I’d like to invite you to dinner tonight… Do you have time?” I asked.

“…”

“You don’t have to feel burdened. It’s just dinner,” I said.

“Well, in that case…”

As expected, Kasugano Yuno walked up to me and chimed in, “Mr. Lee Ki-Young, you

have plans today."

'Yeah, I know. I just said it just to be polite.'

"I see. That's unfortunate. We'll have to get together another time," I told them.

"You don't have to worry about us. Your offer is more than enough."

"No, I'd like to treat you… I'll let you know when I'm available," I said.

"O-Okay! We'll be looking forward to it."

They looked pretty energetic when they responded, so I expected them to be that energetic once they were carrying the palanquin once again.

My words of encouragement were pretty effective. Instead of glaring at me like earlier, they seemed happy about the fact that I was taking care of them. Their stats were lacking compared to other adventurers on this expedition, so I was sure they were happy when I offered them dinner.

After all, that was an offer one couldn't even buy with money.

'Should I just hire them as a staff?'

It'd make things comfortable, but…

"I look forward to working with you all," I said.

"We should be the ones saying that, Father Lee Ki-Young. We'll make sure to keep you safe," they said.

'Yeah, blondie. I'm glad you said that.'

I was in the middle of talking to the strike squad members when Floretta, my new adjutant, ran toward me and said, "I have something to report, Commander. The sixth strike squad encountered a hidden boss monster.

"They managed to reorganize and attack the hidden boss monster, but it was ineffective. They suffered great losses, but there weren't many casualties. However, Mr. Elias…"

‘Did he die?’

“He was seriously injured,” Floretta added.

‘Damn it. Stay calm.’

“I-I see…”

'But… is Hye-Jin okay?'

CHAPTER 955
MOOD (6)

“The name of the hidden boss is Gelk, and it is about ten meters tall. We believe it’s a roaming-type monster that wanders around the entire dungeon.

"The sixth strike squad was attacked exactly an hour and eleven minutes ago. They regrouped after the ambush and tried to take down Gelk, but it was no use.

"While trying to help the members of the strike squad escape, Mr. Elias suffered a serious injury, so they decided to create a safe zone where Mr. Elias is currently resting,” Floretta reported.

“Is Hye-Jin noonim safe?” Park Deok-Gu asked.

“Yes, she’s safe,” Floretta replied.

‘Did Elias get hurt while trying to rescue Jo Hye-Jin? I feel like he overextended there… ’

I wasn't supposed to think that way, but I couldn’t help but question it.

As expected, a needlessly tragic scene played out in the footage recorded by the sixth strike squad.

— Get away, everyone! Leave it to me.

‘What can you do?’

— Mr. Elias!

‘Look at Hye-Jin’s sad face.’

— Damn it!

A towering monster charged at everyone, seemingly trying to crush the entire strike squad with its body alone.

A member of the strike squad screamed as the monster stomped on him. The monster had a bizarre appearance. It actually didn't look like one entity. Instead, it looked like the entire monster was made out of many different monster body parts.

Overall, it looked gross.

When I saw how there were appendages of various sizes sticking out all over it…

“We believe it absorbed the monsters in the dungeon,” Floretta told me.

Floretta was right.

“I can see why there hasn’t been a big battle up until now,” I commented.

“That’s right. The sixth strike squad encountered Gelk on the second basement floor of the dungeon. Considering the first strike squad is currently on floor five, it’s likely that Gelk had absorbed other monsters while climbing from floor five to floor two.

"We assume that the boss monster was also probably…” Floretta trailed off.

‘If Gelk had absorbed it as well, then we should assume that its stats are incredibly high right now.’

“Why couldn't the rangers find any traces of Gelk when they went ahead of the strike squad? I’m sure a monster that big was easily noticeable…” I asked.

“We've confirmed that the monster can erase its traces. After escaping, the rangers of the sixth strike squad tried to find it, but…” Floretta trailed off.

“But they couldn’t find it,” I said.

“Yes. They couldn’t find any traces of it," Floretta said, nodding.

Gelk’s ability to erase its traces could be one of its innate abilities, or it could have obtained it upon absorbing another monster.

[I must tell them… I must… tell them…]

— Miss Jo Hye-Jin. Get away! I’ll take care of…

[I have to tell them… I have to…]

— *Ahhhhhh!*

[I have to tell them…]

Elias, the most innocent man of this era, pushed Jo Hye-Jin away and tried to move just outside of the monster's range.

— Mr. Elias!

However, if Hye-Jin hadn't pulled his arm toward her, he would have become one with the boss monster. Elias wanted to be a pure-hearted man, but sadly, he lacked the skills to do so, and a pure but incompetent person was just a pitiful person.

‘He's becoming a nuisance, damn it.’

Whether Elias wanted it or not, the situation ended that way.

“This was all we could confirm from the footage. We haven’t confirmed Gelk’s exact location, but we analyzed its behavior, and we believe that it’s trying to find a way to the top. According to the report sent by the sixth strike squad…”

I thought the same thing.

Those who were unaware of the dungeon's history would have a difficult time figuring out what was going on, but Benigoa used to be here.

If we took into account the size and the architectural style of the underground temple as well as Benigoa’s strange behavior, this underground temple was definitely her prison.

Over the years, many people had to have come here to complete a variety of missions, and the key members of the operation had to have fused to become the boss monster. I was convinced that Gelk was a messenger with a mission to travel between the surface world and the underground temple.

[I have to… tell them… I have to.]

It would make sense if one took into account its strange obsession with its final task.

If one were to add its ability to erase its traces, the theory would become pretty convincing.

“The main force is most likely going to encounter Gelk,” I said.

“That’s right. If we’re certain that it’s finding a way to head to the surface, it’s highly likely that it’ll run into the main force,” Floretta said.

“How about forming a separate group to subdue Gelk, Mr. Ki-Young?” Kim Hyun-Sung suggested.

‘Does he have some kind of sickness that makes him chase after monsters whenever he encounters them?’

“It’s too risky, Mr. Hyun-Sung. We haven’t figured out the details of the dungeon or the monster’s base stats. This probably won’t happen, but I’d like to avoid casualties as much as possible,” I answered.

“How about ordering the sixth strike squad to eliminate the monster again?" Kim Hyun-Sung asked.

‘Do you want Hye-Jin to get hurt?’

“I don’t want to burden the sixth strike squad. Mr. Elias and other people with serious injuries are still recovering. Moreover, the monster is also difficult to locate. Even if we can somehow find it, it's not that easy to take it down. The main force will take care of Gelk. We’ll set up camp at the entrance and wait for it to come,” I ordered.

“But…”

‘What do you mean 'but'? This guy… ’

“That’s the best solution. Don’t think about taking a separate group to fight Gelk. We’ll get ready now. We'll send the rangers out first, and the main force will follow. We’re near the entrance, so let’s pick up the pace,” I instructed.

‘Hidden Boss or not, it’ll just be a sandbag.’

If Gelk had already shown everything it had in the footage just now, then it'd become

nothing but a sandbag once it reached the entrance.

Gelk seemed to have a penchant for attacking others using its massive body. If we knew exactly where it was going to show up and its destination, then we could easily prepare for it in advance.

'And we have Ha-Yan with us.'

The Blue Guild's foundation was solid. Park Deok-Gu and the other tanks could block its path while the mages were going to attack it from afar. If the shields of the tanks were enough to withstand its attacks, then its towering body would become its biggest weakness rather than its strength.

'It's screwed if we can place a trap for it in advance.'

Our stats were amazing, so it'd be embarrassing if we couldn't take down a massive idiot with these members.

'We can also get samples from it.'

If it had started from the fifth floor and had been absorbing other monsters while climbing, I was sure it had a ton of samples to give us.

We could obtain both normal and boss monster samples.

It was a chance to achieve great results and the one and only chance to bring Jin Cheong down. I'd be able to criticize that incompetent fool by hunting down a monster that he couldn't hunt down.

The only variable would be us getting stuck here.

'I wonder how many special abilities it has.'

I assumed it had at least five special abilities. If it was truly capable of plundering the abilities of other monsters, then things would become dangerous. We could end up in a safe zone, just like the sixth strike squad.

Fortunately, we were on the lower floors.

The meeting had already ended, but I was still thinking about the upcoming

operation.

It was a good thing that we stood to gain more than what we'd lose.

“Mr. Lee Ki-Young, we’ll be at the entrance soon,” Floretta informed.

“Okay.”

I opened the window and saw the large door that I had seen earlier using my Telescope.

The massive door was even more overwhelming in person, but it also looked like a work of art.

I couldn't help but come up with a story in my head as I stared at the people setting up camp. The field commanders had taken control of the situation, and a large wall of shields was soon created. The mages and priests moved to their designated locations.

They started channeling an easy spell in the safest location possible, so I was confident that they wouldn't encounter any issues whatsoever.

“The strike squads will rest but are ready to fight at any time!"

“Is there anyone who hasn’t received a potion yet?”

“The Strike Squad Commander will soon visit each unit. Make sure the preparations are done perfectly.”

‘They’re all professionals, so I’m sure they’re doing fine. Do I really need to visit them and make them feel uncomfortable?’

No one would look forward to the visit of their superior. I understood that they wanted everything to be perfect, but the members of the main force weren’t rookies.

I had won the hearts of the people earlier, but it felt like my efforts had gone down the drain. Fortunately, the ground started trembling, and the distraction minimized the damage to my reputation, eliciting a smile from me.

“Prepare for battle!”

The rangers notified the control tower that the monster was coming, while the control tower notified the field commanders of the rangers' report.

“Mr. Ki-Young, I think you'll be safer if you stay back a little,” Kim Hyun-Sung suggested.

‘I’m already in the back.’

Jung Ha-Yan and the other mages continued with their channeling as the giant door opened slowly.

[I have to deliver it…]

A massive ball of fire erupted, enveloping the monster along with many other spells.

[You have encountered Gelk, the dungeon's Hidden Boss.]

BOOM!

[I have to… I have to…]

The allied troops fired magic arrows at the monster. Magic arrows were powerful, but they couldn't obstruct anyone's vision, so they were pretty useful.

From time to time, powerful spells capable of inflicting serious damage to just about anyone would be cast at the monster, causing a thick fog to envelop the battlefield.

However, the fog was not really an issue as the mages easily vanquished it with a wind-type spell. The archers fired their arrows nonstop, and the powerful ranged adventurers unleashed their powerful attacks as well.

[I-I have to…]

‘What do you have to deliver, you weakling?’

[I have to…]

“Keep attacking! Don’t give it a chance to attack us!”

Booooooooom!

Kabooooooooom!

[*Ack… ahh… ahh!*]

The monster swung its large hand while moving slowly toward us. The allied melee adventurers blocked its path, preventing it from coming closer. Park Deok-Gu was the main tank, and he looked pretty reliable as he faced the massive monster on his own.

“Don’t let your guard down and maintain your distance, you pig,” I said.

“I know that!” Park Deok-Gu shouted.

We only had one job to do here—make sure that the monster wouldn't inadvertently assimilate us.

The mages cast spells imbued with holy power on Park Deok-Gu, while the traps were activated to trap Gelk. We were also using the ballistas that were made to fight extremely large monsters.

The battle was going so smoothly that I didn’t need to get involved at all. Of course, there were variables. The monster stomped forward, creating a shockwave that interrupted the mages' channeling.

“Mages, move to the back!”

[I have to… deliver…]

‘What are you talking about, you idiot?’

[The fact that… the Mole Saint has died… must be delivered to the surface…]

‘…’

[The Mole Saint has died… She… dead…]

‘What?’

[The Mole Saint who's been supporting the continent for a long time… has died…]

“Stop attacking,” I ordered.

[The poor and pitiful Mole Saint… the saint who was forced to make sacrifices… has killed… herself.]

“Stop attacking! Stop attacking! Stop attacking!"

[She crawled into the iron maiden herself… and met… a miserable… end. *Ahh*… the continent… the brilliant… and blinding continent… now…]

I had to say something.

“Messenger Gelk will follow the orders of the honorary cardinal.”

From my experience, nothing bad had ever happened whenever I talked in a situation like this.

CHAPTER 956
MOOD (7)

I was confident that it happened a long, long time ago. It had to have happened way before the Order of Benigoa settled down here. Moreover, it wasn't even a known story.

If the Mole Saint weren't Benigoa, the situation would get complicated, but the Mole Saint's story was definitely Benigoa's story. Otherwise, she wouldn't have transformed this place into a dungeon.

The relief carving of Benigoa on the door was the biggest clue.

If this was the story of the saint who stopped the threat to the continent by allowing herself to get locked up underground from the moment she was born until the day she took her last breath…

'That'd be a pretty good story, then.'

I was sure there were many other versions of it, but one thing I was kind of confused about was the fact that Benigoa's story was actually edited.

The denizens actually had no idea what happened here.

In the memoirs of the people of the Order or the religious books related to Benigoa, there wasn't a single piece of information about how Benigoa had ended up getting locked up underground her entire life.

Benigoa was remembered as the goddess who had brought light to the continent, and none of those scriptures had ever mentioned her life as a human being. As time went on, her story changed slowly until it was edited and rewritten. Still, it was strange how her story as a human being had disappeared in the process of her becoming a goddess.

'Did someone hide it intentionally?'

If I were a devotee, I would hide it as well because the fact that we had to lock up a human being underground to get rid of the threat to the continent was pretty disgraceful.

If I were in their shoes, I'd tell the denizens that a saint named Benigoa had saved the continent, which was exactly what people knew about her today.

In that case, did Benigoa herself want to hide this true story of hers, or was it the opposite?

It was possible that she wanted to hide her miserable life at first.

Otherwise, the Mole Saint's Cozy Sanctuary would have appeared earlier.

The Order of Benigoa was already in the middle of stabilizing, so there was no reason for her to do something like that at this point. There was also a chance that she simply did not want to remember the time she spent as a human being, or she might be in denial.

Perhaps she had no expectations from the continent. Perhaps she didn't care whether the truth would end up getting revealed or not, as she had experienced all those hardships underground. I assumed that was her feelings when she transformed this place into a dungeon.

'She's basically asking me to take care of this. She wants me to obtain the corpse inside the iron maiden, and she wants me to tell the world about what actually happened here.'

Benigoa's blood was still flowing out of the iron maiden, so her corpse was still in there.

On top of that, Gelk had yet to complete his mission.

If this dungeon hadn't appeared, the Mole Saint's story would have remained underground forever.

[C-Cardinal… Cardinal…]

'But… I'm not sure if this is going to work. It's been too long, and the empire probably has yet to exist back then. This place was probably just an ordinary kingdom when all

this happened.'

[Caaar… dinal…? Yooou…]

I wondered whether the Order had cardinals back then. The position could be different back then, but there had to be cardinals.

'Damn it, come to think of it, their name wasn't Order of Benigoa back then. What was their name back then? I feel like many things have changed since then.'

I couldn't help but feel like I should have kept my mouth shut.

I told Gelk to follow my orders, but I'd look weird if it refused to follow my orders. The people were already staring at me.

'Damn it, this won't do.'

The answer to awkward situations was always the light, so spreading my wings was the answer here.

I spread my wings of radiant light, and a large amount of holy power filled the cavern. It was a unique and gentle but blinding light. The majority of the people around me exclaimed at the sight.

[*Ahh… ahhhh!*]

Even the monster was in awe.

"Gelk, complete your mission," I said.

I spoke gently but with confidence as if I were trying to persuade the messenger, Gelk.

'Gelk, I know you've been through a lot. This Saint of Light understands that you've been wandering around like a ghost. It's okay. Just let it go. Pour out everything that's inside you.'

[*Ahhhhh… Haaaaaaaa!*]

'That's right.'

I had no idea where its "true" eyes were located, as it technically had no face. However, the eyes all over it started crying as Gelk trembled like an aspen tree. Moments later, it stopped moving and spoke.

[T-the Mole… Moleee… Saint… went inside… the iron maiden herself… and killed herself…]

"…"

[The saint who supported the continent for a long time… rejected her own life… the saint was trembling in pain…]

'Man, why is it having such a hard time talking?'

[The danger… the threat… to the brilliant and glorious continent… is now…]

'I just want to smack it.'

[The… underground temple… must notify the Order… of the new plan… I cannot let the continent get destroyed…]

'…'

[The saint will be born… *Ah*… the saint… will be born as the prophecy foretold… This saint will love the continent… embrace the continent… and live for the continent… But remember… my sons and daughters… my precious descendants… don't let this saint look at the sky… don't let this sky look at the light… If the saint looks at the light, you'll lose everything… You'll lose… all of your holy power and miracles.]

'What the? Is that a prophecy?'

[A new prophecy… is needed. A new divine message… a new light that will support the continent… A new light is needed…]

'What the? This feels strange.'

'Let me lower the brightness a little by folding two of my wings.'

[The continent… The radiant and glorious… continent… The continent… The continent!]

'What the… the monster is acting strange.'

[The saint! The *saaaint!* Will appear!]

That scared me.

[The saint! Will appear!!!]

'Shit!'

[The saint will appear! As the prophecy foretold!!! The saint will appear! This saint will love the continent… embrace the continent! And live for the continent… But remember! My sons and daughters… my precious descendants!!! Don't let this saint look at the sky! Don't let this sky look at the light… If the saint looks at the light, you'll lose everything… You'll lose… all of your holy power and miracles! The saint will appear!!!]

"*Aaaah!* Damn it, Hyun-Sung!" I shouted.

[The saaaaint!!!]

"…"

It was such a grotesque scene that I forgot about my character.

The mouths embedded in the monster opened wide and screamed like a lunatic.

[The saint! Will appear!!! The saint!!! The saint!!! Is here!!!]

A cacophony of deafening voices repeated the same words.

'Shit, I hope no one heard me scream just now.'

I wasn't sure whether I was supposed to feel relieved about this or not, but no one was listening to me. Everyone was focused on the bizarre monster. Even if there was someone listening to me, I was sure they thought they misheard me.

Unfortunately, it seemed that one person managed to hear me.

An arm suddenly burst out of the monster's figure, and it made a beeline for me. I

knew I had to say something here to explain why the monster was suddenly running rampant.

“You’ve… You’ve been completely corrupted…”

'If we’re not on the same page… then you’ve been corrupted.'

“…”

“Rest for the monster…” I said.

The problem was that it wasn’t *that* easy to put it to rest.

Kim Hyun-Sung split the arm in half with a single stroke of his sword.

The monster looked like it was vomiting whatever it had eaten as pale monsters rushed out of it like a deluge.

[The saaaaint!!!]

‘Go away!’

[The saint will come! The saint will come!!!]

The sight of pale monsters crawling up the ceiling and walls was so disgusting.

[The saaaaaaaint!!!]

The monster extended its arm and charged at me. It was obvious why it had decided to charge at me. The main force wasn’t really shocked by the monster's actions, and they sent troops toward the monster.

Their numbers weren't important. This monster was nothing more than a gatekeeper at the start of a dungeon.

The strike squad members fought the monsters, and colorful spells flew everywhere.

Kim Hyun-Sung slaughtered the monsters with wings.

There were too many of them for one person to handle, but it didn’t really matter to

Kim Hyun-Sung. He spread his wings and spun once in mid-air, sending the monsters plummeting to the ground.

Appendages in a variety of sizes burst out of the fallen chunks of meat, and the chunks of meat tried to crawl away. Unfortunately, they were nothing more than chunks of meat, so everyone made quick work of them.

'Division.'

It seemed that they could return to Gelk and merge with him again.

The chunks of meat that couldn't move forward turned to Gelk and started making their way toward it.

[The saint!!! The continent… The continent will be saved again!!! It will forever be radiant and glorious… That's how it will be!]

'This is easy.'

I glanced over at Han Sora, and she nodded at me before casting a spell.

She cast a poison-type spell at the chunks of meat. The poison seemed to be capable of purifying anything under its influence as the ground dyed in purple was slowly clearing up.

Gelk became sluggish, and the chunks of meat that couldn't fuse properly fell to the ground.

[For the future of the continent! For the new saint!!!]

The monster could no longer maintain its form.

It seemed that the monster was in a DPS check phase earlier.

[*Ahhh… ahhhhhhh!*]

The monster seemed to have realized that its massive body wasn't going to last long, as it extended its hand out as far as possible to try and escape.

However, a sizzling noise echoed afterward as its arm melted away.

'Ha-Yan.'

Jung Ha-Yan was quietly casting a spell beside me.

'I wonder if this monster will drop any items.'

A functional item would be nice, but it'd be nice if it dropped an item related to the dungeon. Perhaps Gelk's journal, letter, or documents that'd help clear the dungeon. Of course, anything expensive was nice as well.

The hunt continued while I was having many other thoughts, and it was all because there wasn't much I could comment about the fight. I was satisfied by everyone, as they were all doing their roles.

Soon, something caught my attention.

'Gelk is really disgusting.'

The monsters looked disgusting, but the things they did were even more disgusting.

The mutilated and grotesque-looking chunks of meat were crawling toward me as if it was trying to get their hands on the saint.

Just then, the monster seemed to have lost its mind as it roared with its appendages extended toward me.

[The saaaaaaaaaaaaint!!! The saaaaint!!!]

'Ah, shit.'

[*Gaah!* The saaaaaaaint!]

I wasn't the only one upset. The troops at the front line all looked terrified while staring at the monster. The monster wasn't afraid of getting hurt or dying. There were many types of monsters in the dungeon, but this type of monster was really unpleasant to handle.

[*Hahahahaha! Hahaha… hahahaha!!!* The saint!!! Will come!!! The saint!!! Will appear!!! It's the saint!!! The saint!!! Has arrived!!!]

Everyone's expression remained solemn until the end of the fight.

It couldn't be helped. They all realized that the dungeon was more grotesque and bizarre than they had ever imagined.

‘Damn it… I’m feeling uncomfortable as well.’

I had no idea that things would turn out this way, either.

'I'm serious, Hyun-Sung. Really, Hyun-Sung… '

“Damn it…” Kim Hyun-Sung mumbled. “Damn it! That's why I said that you shouldn’t come here!”

Kim Hyun-Sung threw a fit as if a button to annoy him had just been pressed.

CHAPTER 957
MOOD (8)

“Why… Damn it! Why did I…”

‘You’re questioning why you brought me with you?’

“Damn it… I knew this was going to happen… Damn it!” Kim Hyun-Sung shouted.

‘No, I actually had no idea that this was going to happen.’

It felt like I was walking on ice because he was really angry. If I could turn back time, I'd turn back time and do something else. He was mumbling something to himself that I couldn't quite understand, but the meaning in his words was unmistakable.

I was sure he was thinking along the lines of, *"Why did I even bring him with me? I knew something was going to happen again. He said he’s fine, but I know he’s not fine. I shouldn’t have believed him. I knew something was off. Look, we're in a dangerous situation again…”*

‘Kim Hyun-Sung has become pretty savage.’

Obviously, he didn’t scream all of that at me because he had long realized that he wouldn't get anything out of arguing with me. In addition, he knew that I'd pout if he were to yell at me.

I assumed he'd kick the ground and take his frustration out on the deceased Gelk on the ground. I assumed he'd do that to show me that he was furious. I was convinced that he wanted to show me that he was right and that he knew that this was going to happen.

‘Actually, he doesn’t even have the luxury to do that.’

It was all because he was pretty desperate as well.

“*Whoo… whoo…*”

‘The members of the strike squad are staring at him. We also need to see what kind of items that monster had dropped.’

“Damn it…” Kim Hyun-Sung cursed. The button to annoy him was pressed, so he was throwing a fit

Actually, Kim Hyun-Sung's reaction was understandable, as it hadn't been that long since I carried the pain of the continent and sacrificed myself for it before being revived.

In other words, the painful memories were coming back to him.

Just as he was starting to look forward to living a happy life. I ended up getting kidnapped, which lit a fire inside of him. The fire within him erupted completely when he heard the words "sacrifice" and "for the continent," causing him to throw a fit.

The word "sacrifice" sounded good to some people, but it was a very frightening word for Kim Hyun-Sung. He was scared of being asked to make sacrifices, and he was terrified of it to the point that he'd feel like having a seizure just by hearing that word or any synonym of it.

In his eyes, the continent was a place that constantly demanded sacrifices from him or from other people.

The moment he thought that *only* happy days were waiting for him, the word "sacrifice" popped up in front of him again. To make matters worse, the word popped up when he least expected it to appear.

‘Shit, but I really had no idea, man… ’

Kim Hyun-Sung looked like he was a mentally unstable patient having a panic attack.

‘Sometimes, he'd have nightmares related to it.’

Sometimes, I'd feel him waking up and throwing a fit due to a nightmare. Right now, he wasn’t in the condition to think rationally. As expected, he gathered the adjutants and declared something ludicrous.

“We need to head back up.”

"…"

"I'm canceling the expedition," Kim Hyun-Sung added.

'Cancel, my ass.'

"I can't let you get in any more danger. There's something strange about this dungeon. This is no ordinary dungeon, so we must make more preparations," Kim Hyun-Sung explained.

I had to say something as well.

"Nothing will cancel the expedition."

"…"

"We'll continue the expedition," I added.

"Didn't you hear it just now? You heard everything that monster said," Kim Hyun-Sung argued.

'Yeah, I heard it, but it doesn't matter.'

"Like you said, there's something strange about this dungeon. A temple this big, the statue, and the Mole Saint are all just below the Vatican… There must be a legend about the Vatican—I mean, about the 'true' Order that has been missing all this while.

"This dungeon will reveal the truth to everyone. It will reveal where it all went wrong, what kind of mistakes we've been making, and why the Templars betrayed the Vatican.

"We'll also unearth a piece of history unknown to the continent, and we'll know the secret that the order has been trying to hide all this while," I explained.

"T-That has nothing to do with you, Mr. Ki-Young. You—"

"I'm the honorary cardinal of the Order and a believer of Goddess Benigoa. What happened here is closely related to me. I believe there's a reason she guided me here," I interrupted Kim Hyun-Sung.

“You are what they want!” Kim Hyun-Sung shouted, continuing his sentence.

“…”

Kim Hyun-Sung was about to throw another fit, but he calmed down before my glare.

‘That’s right. You shouldn’t swear when the holy knights and the priests are here.’

Upon obtaining everyone's attention, Kim Hyun-Sung continued the conversation.

“You heard the monster’s prophecy…”

“…”

“It talked about the Mole Saint's story, who was locked up here all her life. Don’t you think the Mole Saint, who served the continent all her life, resembles a certain someone?

"The beings up there don’t really care about the pain that the humans down here are experiencing and will experience. All they care about is the continent running smoothly, and they’re willing to sacrifice anyone to achieve that,” Kim Hyun-Sung explained.

“…”

“The sudden appearance of a dungeon here is strange as well. This is a trap. Everything looks like a trap to pull you in,” Kim Hyun-Sung added.

‘No, I don’t think so.’

“I’m sure there’s a problem in the system, and I’m sure it needs you to handle that problem. I’m sure the beings up there have chosen you to take the Mole Saint’s place,” Kim Hyun-Sung said.

‘He’s too paranoid. It’s like he’s delusional. One of those beings up there might be me, you know?’

There were parts in his argument that I thought were right.

If the continent really ended up in danger, then it wouldn’t be a bad idea to sacrifice

one human being to stabilize the continent.

I wasn't convinced that one of the gods up there would sacrifice themselves, but if they needed holy power, I was sure they'd set that kind of condition—the clear condition to sacrifice a saint with enough holy power to stabilize the continent.

Obviously, it was a lose-lose business venture that would surely make them suffer a huge loss.

I was sure that the only way for them to reduce the initial investment cost was to penalize the Mole Saint, and her penalty was to ensure that she wouldn't see the light again.

'But I'm sure that's not the case…… ' Their mindset and moral principles were different from humans, but they weren't demons. *'I'm sure no one up there is that big of a scum; they care about their own children, after all.'*

I believed there was more to the Mole Saint's story. A demon could have interfered, or the Templar could have fabricated the prophecy.

"The monster wasn't in its right mind to begin with, so I don't think you need to be too worried about it. I guarantee that the thing you're worried about will not happen," I reassured him.

"If I were the target, I wouldn't be so anxious, Mr. Ki-Young. Think about all the things you've experienced up until now. Can you really say… that this is nothing? Something is off… Damn it…" Kim Hyun-Sung said.

Kim Hyun-Sung was trying not to raise his voice.

'It'll be easier to deal with him if he just gets angry at me… '

I thought I just needed to stay quiet for him to get mad at me, but he actually stayed calm.

"It's fine," I said.

"It's not fine. You've always said that it'll be fine and that everything is fine now… but just look at the outcome. Do I need to explain each and everything that has happened so far?" he asked.

‘Get angry, Hyun-Sung. Yell at me or something.’

“It was required,” I told him.

“It wasn’t required in the end,” Kim Hyun-Sung argued.

‘If you stay calm like this, I have no choice but to press the button that’ll make you throw a fit.’

“No matter what you think, I believe all of that was needed,” I said.

'Pause here… '

“If… If it’s needed this time… as well—”

“Damn it!” Kim Hyun-Sung shouted.

'He fell for it.'

“Damn it! What’s wrong with you?!” Kim Hyun-Sung yelled.

'He’s angry and worked up now.'

“What the hell is wrong with you that you act like this every time?! Why… why?! Every time! Why do you think about the others first every time?! Damn it! Why?!” Kim Hyun-Sung shouted.

I pressed the button that would make him throw a fit, and he actually threw a fit. I was sure this situation was frustrating for him. He probably told himself that he needed to keep it in, but my remark had to have triggered him, causing him to lose his mind.

He yelled at me, but he quickly realized his mistake.

His glaring eyes soon looked down, and his voice mellowed out.

“You seem really worked up, so I think it’s best if we talk about this next time,” I suggested.

“I-It wasn’t like that. I-I just…”

“I told you that this place was the safest place. Even if we head back up, nothing will change. If this dungeon was truly created to find a scapegoat, they’d just come to the surface someday to look for that scapegoat,” I told him.

'Gelk tried to head outside as well.'

“We can’t block the dungeon entrance forever. The anomalies throughout the continent are getting worse day by day. If we don’t clear it… the thing we don’t even want to think about will happen. As you said, this isn’t an ordinary dungeon, so…” I trailed off.

“…”

“So I believe we should prioritize clearing this dungeon,” I added.

“…”

“That’s the purpose of this expedition, and that’s why all these people are here. I’m not the only one who’s willing to sacrifice themselves to protect the continent. Everyone here thinks the same,” I said.

Of course, there were some who simply came here to hunt, but most of the volunteers had come here with noble intentions.

“I don't want to rip open those wounds; the continent has been through a lot, after all. Everyone is here because they all have something precious they want to protect.

"As I mentioned earlier, the goal here isn't my safety. The goal is to clear the dungeon, and everyone is simply carrying out the tasks that they were given,” I added.

I looked around and saw people cleaning up the area.

The rest treated the wounded or were repairing their gear with their guards up.

There were some who checked the loot that Gelk had dropped.

I wanted to check the loot as well, but I couldn’t do it because Kim Hyun-Sung was in my way. I also saw alchemists and mages gathering samples from Gelk's corpse, and I was proud of them for carrying out their tasks.

I really wanted to compliment the members for working hard.

'Work harder and sweat more.'

“I’m honestly worried about whether you’ll be able to lead this expedition group. If these people end up getting hurt because of you making the wrong decision…” I trailed off.

“I…”

This was the decisive blow.

“I think it’s best if you take a break,” I suggested.

“What?”

“You should cool your head,” I clarified.

'I’m sorry for making you emotional and for pressing that button, but I think you’re too *emotional right now. I don't think you should continue being the leader under these circumstances.'*

“I’m not telling you to drop out of the group… I just think that you should step down from *that* position for now…” I told him.

‘It’s a temporary demotion. You understand why I'm doing this, right? I’ll reinstate you once you’ve come back to your senses.’

Of course, I couldn't actually make that decision on my own.

Kim Hyun-Sung actually had the right to refuse on the outside, but he wouldn't be able to refuse, as I was right, and he knew that I was right.

Kim Hyun-Sung was too emotional right now, and he knew that he wasn’t in a position to make a reasonable decision.

He was really worked up, and any thoughts of clearing the dungeon had already disappeared from his mind.

“O-Okay…” Kim Hyun-Sung answered. He looked really dejected, but it was fine.

He wouldn't be getting any sleep tonight, so I decided to cheer him up a bit the next morning.

'He's… going to have nightmares… tonight.'

He was definitely going to have nightmares. He'd scream and wake up from his sleep.

'I guarantee that he's going to have a nightmare tonight.'

"…"

"…"

At exactly 3:28 a.m. the next day, everyone fell asleep with a minimum number of people staying up as night watch. As expected, I saw Kim Hyun-Sung sitting in front of the bonfire by himself, and he was trembling pitifully.

CHAPTER 958
MOOD (9)

I woke up at around half past two in the morning.

I could probably ignore him if I wanted to ignore him, but I had already decided that I would comfort Kim Hyun-Sung today, so I had to get up.

His nightmare tonight had to be worse than usual, as anxiety was eating away at him.

I wasn't using my Telescope, but I could clearly see what was going on in his tent.

He woke up drenched in sweat, and he was breathing in ragged pants. He reached under his bed, as that was where his sword was located. After realizing that he was inside his tent, he sighed and gulped down a glass of cold water.

Unfortunately, it was not enough to make his anxiety go away.

He could no longer sleep, so he washed his face and stepped outside to see what was going on. After checking the palanquin, he calmed down and started walking around the camp, as he was feeling depressed.

'I should head out now.'

It was time for me to move, but my body wouldn't listen to me. The problem was that Jung Ha-Yan was sleeping next to me, and her legs were on me. I was used to it, as this wasn't the first time she had crawled onto my bed.

Actually, I wasn't supposed to worry about Jung Ha-Yan.

'Why is Han Sora here?'

Han Sora was curled up next to Jung Ha-Yan.

To make things worse, she was awake. I had no idea if she had woken up at around the same time as me or if she had never slept, but I was sure she was going through

the same struggle as me.

I struggled to move Jung Ha-Yan's body to the side…

'Why is she so strong?'

I couldn't move or push her to the side.

And that was when Han Sora and I made eye contact…

I decided to ask her for help.

"Please help me, Miss Sora. Actually, why are you even here?" I asked.

"Miss Jung Ha-Yan asked me to come with her…" Han Sora answered.

Thanks to Han Sora trying her best to pull Jung Ha-Yan to the side, I managed to escape and stand up. I managed to escape Jung Ha-Yan's grip, but Han Sora ended up sacrificing herself and getting stuck in my place.

"P-Please help me, too, Sub Guild Master," Han Sora requested.

"…"

"I need to go to the bathroom. I-I've been awake for thirty minutes. I haven't been able to move because of Miss Jung Ha-Yan…" Han Sora explained.

"…" "Sir?"

'It'll be bad if Ha-Yan wakes up now. She's definitely going to follow me if that happens.'

"…"

"Sir?"

'Sorry.'

"Sub… Guild…"

"…"

“That jerk…” Han Sora.

“…”

“Sh—”

I heard her struggling behind me, but there was no way Han Sora could beat Jung Ha-Yan’s Strength.

Jung Ha-Yan had to have instinctively noticed that the spot on her right was empty, so she stuck to Han Sora, who was on her left side.

Han Sora was definitely going to struggle, but it was just a temporary struggle. Kim Hyun-Sung's mental health was more important than Han Sora’s issue.

I heard Han Sora struggling as I got ready to go out, but I had to ignore her struggle for the continent's sake.

‘It’s cold outside.’

It was still 3:28 a.m., and everyone was asleep.

I saw Kim Hyun-Sung sitting in front of the bonfire alone and trembling pitifully.

Kim Hyun-Sung was extremely sensitive to other people’s presence, but he seemed to be extremely deep in his thoughts, as he didn't notice my presence until I got too close to him.

He was probably thinking about the nightmare he had tonight.

I wasn’t sure about what kind of nightmare it was, but I had an idea as to what happened. He probably dreamed of a happy continent where everyone lived their daily lives in joy.

The reason it was a nightmare was that the brother he had a bond with wasn’t there. He noticed something amiss in his dreams, so he wandered around and ended up in front of the God of Sacrifice and Revival's temple.

He had to have screamed there, which woke him up from his dream, or he could have had a dream where I was in extreme agony.

There was also a chance that he dreamed of me ending up in an iron maiden, screaming for help like a maniac at the bottommost floor of this dungeon.

Obviously, Kim Hyun-Sung couldn’t reach me in his dream. No matter how long he ran, and regardless of what he did, he couldn’t save the Saint of Light. In the end, I stopped screaming, and the dream had to have ended there.

‘There can be variables, too.’

If Kim Hyun-Sung somehow managed to stop Lee Ki-Young, the continent could end up getting destroyed, as the God of Sacrifice and Revival—the Saint of Light—couldn't do anything to save it.

The Saint of Light would then resent Kim Hyun-Sung and the guild members who stopped him from doing what was necessary to save the continent. He'd then be filled with guilt and helplessness, which would end in him taking his own life before everyone.

‘I actually saw a plot like that in a play.’

The nightmare could be worse, or it was probably not as bad as I assumed it to be.

Regardless, it was a shocking nightmare that made Kim Hyun-Sung unable to go back to sleep. It was a terrifying nightmare that tormented Kim Hyun-Sung a lot.

When I made a noise, he grabbed his sword instantly, and he relaxed when he saw me.

Honestly, I got kind of scared by his instant reaction.

“Mr. Ki-Young?” Kim Hyun-Sung said.

“…”

“I-I’m sorry, I just—”

“It’s fine. I think I was too quiet just now. I didn't want to startle you…” I said.

“It’s not like that…” Kim Hyun-Sung mumbled.

‘It’s okay. I’m not here to be nitpicky about that.’

'I wonder what he thinks of me… ''

It was true that I preferred working at my own pace, but I wasn't such a psycho that he had to be wary of me. I felt kind of bad for him when I saw him being wary of me despite the fact that I was here to comfort him.

He was still the hero of the continent, after all.

I was a bit harsh on him today, and he seemed really disheartened. He no longer had a title or power here, and the fact that he had nothing made him look pathetic. His shoulders were drooping, and he still seemed worried about my reaction…

‘Why does he look so pitiful?’

He looked really happy when he told me that he'd open a bag festival in the future.

“Looks like you couldn't sleep,” I said.

“You, too?” he asked.

“Yes… I couldn’t stop thinking about what happened today… I think I was kind of harsh,” I replied. I started off by feeling kind of bad. I honestly wasn’t feeling bad, but he’d feel better if he knew that I had been worried about him.

“I-It’s okay. As you said, I was *too* emotional. I can't make reasonable decisions right now, so I believe you made the right decision. If I were to continue being the leader of this expedition, something bad would happen,” Kim Hyun-Sung said.

“That’s a bit—”

“You made the right choice,” Kim Hyun-Sung interrupted.

“No, I think… I got a bit too worked up about what happened this afternoon, Mr. Hyun-Sung…” I told him.

“What? What do you…”

“I’m kind of embarrassed to tell you the truth… but the things that happened up until

now…” I trailed off.

“Yes?”

“I got kind of angry… when you said that the things we did up until now were unnecessary,” I confessed.

The campfire crackled, and it was the only noise I could hear amidst the deafening silence.

“…”

“…”

'You said that, but I know that he had no intention of saying that. He probably meant that my sacrifice was unnecessary, but it's all a matter of interpretation.'

‘Yeah, I was pretty angry.’

'Do you really think that I want to remember everything that happened to me over these years? It was a difficult and hard time for me, too.'

There were many painful memories I wanted to forget, and my soul now had a scar that I'd have to carry with me for the rest of my life.

'They were memories that would instantly push me to my limit both mentally and physically, but those memories… are what made us who we are today.

'When we first met as strangers… those painful memories are what helped us build a bond and become brothers. Come to think of it, that’s probably why I got angry yesterday.'

‘It’s like he denied everything. It's like he's saying that everything that has happened up until now has never actually happened.’

I didn’t bother explaining everything with words. I also didn't tell him that I was disappointed in him and that I felt like my feelings were being invalidated.

I couldn’t tell him that I got angry because it felt like he was basically saying that everything we had gone through together was unnecessary.

Kim Hyun-Sung was slow-witted, but he wasn't dumb.

'Expressing that I was angry should be enough, right?'

As expected, Kim Hyun-Sung started feeling better.

'He's really easy to handle.'

"I-Is that so?" Kim Hyun-Sung asked.

"Yes."

"T-That's not what I meant. I was just…"

"I know, but in my eyes, the painful memories… and the memories that I don't even want to remember are all precious memories. I'm talking about what I went through with the guild members, Ha-Yan, Deok-Gu, and you. I know that you didn't mean that either, but…" I trailed off.

"It looks like there was a small misunderstanding," he said.

"Yes, it looks like it," I agreed.

"Would you like a cup of coffee?" Kim Hyun-Sung offered.

"Of course," I answered.

I started poking the campfire because that was the only thing I was good at.

Kim Hyun-Sung took out iron mugs. He placed them above the campfire and sat back down. I was sure this wasn't enough for him to forget his nightmare, but he seemed to be feeling better.

There was a small secret behind the reason I treated him harshly, and it was enough to give strength to the loner who lacked social skills. Of course, this would help with his trauma as well.

'Yeah, those incidents are what made us grow this strong, and they are the reason why we can have a cup of coffee like this.'

From now on, I was sure that he would no longer say that they were unnecessary.

He'd probably even comfort himself, saying that those tragedies were the reason we were here right now. Obviously, I wasn't convinced that it was going to have a positive effect right away, as those tragedies were memories that Kim Hyun-Sung did not even want to keep.

However, what I had done would assuage his discomfort.

“Won’t you be tired later, Mr. Hyun-Sung?” I asked.

“I’ll be fine. In my past life, there were times when I didn’t sleep for a week. More importantly, I've already thrown away the heavy burden on my shoulders. I think the expedition is going to be a lot easier from now on,” Kim Hyun-Sung replied.

‘You’re not being sarcastic, are you?’

“Are you being sarcastic?” I questioned.

“Of course not. I just—”

“I’m kidding,” I interrupted him.

I laughed and then went straight to the point.

“What have you been doing all this time instead of sleeping?” I asked.

'What have you been doing? I couldn’t sleep because of what happened today… so why are you here looking so pitiful and all that?'

It was definitely because he had a nightmare, but Kim Hyun-Sung didn't say anything in response.

I understood the reason behind his silence. He was embarrassed to say that he woke up from a nightmare, and he didn’t want to make me worry about him as well. In addition, if he ended up revealing the truth, he’d have to tell me about that nightmare of his, which was definitely going to be troublesome.

In other words, Kim Hyun-Sung's refusal to confess was his way of avoiding such a hassle.

"*Huh?*"

"I…" Kim Hyun-Sung hesitated.

"Yes?"

I was sure he'd start talking about something else.

"Do you think I'm a selfish person, Mr. Ki-Young?" Kim Hyun-Sung asked.

'I'm not sure… '

"What you said has been bothering me. About how everyone is here to protect the continent," Kim Hyun-Sung said.

'…'

"That's not the case for me at all. Actually, I've never been *that* kind of person," Kim Hyun-Sung confessed.

Was the crackling bonfire making Kim Hyun-Sung feel emotional?

'Did he hit puberty again?'

Kim Hyun-Sung's self-deprecating words that came out of nowhere made me sigh inside.

CHAPTER 959
MOOD (10)

I said it just to win this pointless argument. Was Kim Hyun-Sung *that* impressed by the fact that the expedition members were working hard? I didn't expect that he'd be brooding over my comment about how everyone had gathered for the continent's sake.

If that was how he actually felt…

'I'm sure it's an interesting sight.'

It was all because he didn't really understand what it meant to dedicate oneself to the continent. He had already saved the continent and had given everything he had for it, so it was shocking how he still couldn't understand that.

"You're the hero who saved the continent, Mr. Hyun-Sung…" I said.

"It wasn't my intention. It's just… I just had no choice but to do it. To be honest, this expedition and the people that are gathered here… all of these seem pointless," Kim Hyun-Sung confessed.

He seemed kind of scared. It was like he was worried about saying something ridiculous, and he was scared that I'd despise him because of his thoughts. It wasn't easy to confess that there could be something wrong with him, and it was particularly difficult to do that to a brother.

'His self-esteem was actually really low back then.'

Kim Hyun-Sung was still insecure. There were many times when he acted like nothing was wrong, but there were many times when he stated that the Blue Guild and I weren't right for him.

He knew better than anyone that his past life had destroyed his personality, and leading an ordinary life felt weird to him. This was not really uncommon. There were quite a few soldiers who couldn't adapt to their ordinary lives upon returning home

from war.

I was sure it was worse for Kim Hyun-Sung, as he had survived the majority of the wars he had gone through in his life. He found it uncomfortable to socialize and meet people.

Whenever someone approached him, he tended to take a step back and observe them rather than think that they had no ill intention at all.

There were times when I saw him trying his best to socialize, but he'd usually fail at that. The only place where Kim Hyun-Sung felt comfortable was in the Blue Guild, and the only people he didn't mind hanging around were the guild members and me.

'And that's why he's obsessed with our bond… '

He was probably thinking that our bond was the only reason he was still human, and I was sure he was worried about it.

'He's worried about getting caught red-handed.'

Clearly, he didn't want me to know that he still hadn't been able to adapt to life in society and socialize with people, even though he no longer had to carry those burdens.

'It's something that I've been ignoring for quite a while now… '

The timing wasn't really bad, and it was all because Kim Hyun-Sung was mentally ill…

'And I've been neglecting him, too.'

I needed to take care of him. In fact, I thought time would resolve it, as he looked genuinely happy when he said that he'd hold a ridiculous bag festival. Now that I thought about it, Kim Hyun-Sung had never done anything for himself.

Whenever there were festivals, I'd notice him taking two steps backward and watching people have fun from the sidelines. I could also remember how he'd focus on my reaction upon bringing me bizarre-looking bags.

Whenever it was just the two of us, he'd be like a normal person and break the ice,

but whenever there were other people, he'd take a few steps backward and observe from the sidelines.

Whenever the guild members were having fun, he'd look around and laugh to himself.

There were many times when it seemed like he was confirming whether he was really part of this group or not.

'The more I think about it… '

His mental illness was more serious than I thought.

'He probably enjoys riding his griffon because there's nothing around him.'

He probably felt free in the sky, as there was nothing else around him.

Usually, we'd be alone together whenever we rode our griffons, and Kim Hyun-Sung probably thought that those moments were perfect. He was free from the oppression of society and the burdens of relationships with other people whenever he was in the sky.

No one could restrain him up above.

I couldn't say that this particular mindset of his did not have any influence on his ability to wield the sunset, but in my eyes, the sky was like an escape for him.

The silver lining in this situation was the fact that Kim Hyun-Sung had started the conversation. Although he was asking whether he was a selfish person or not, it'd be a lot easier for me to make a decision if I were to treat his question as his cry for help.

"I think everyone is similar to you," I said.

"That's true… but…" Kim Hyun-Sung paused.

'Yeah, I did tell him that everyone had gathered here for the continent.'

"How about we go for a walk?" I suggested.

“Okay.”

I grabbed my cup and stood up.

Kim Hyun-Sung also grabbed his cup and stood up awkwardly.

While we were walking quietly through the camp, Kim Hyun-Sung’s thoughts were all over the place. He was worrying about silly things like perhaps he wasn't supposed to bring that up.

Eventually, we reached our destination.

“How’s everything going?” I asked.

“Welcome, Commander. A-And the Guild Master of the Blue Guild,” a sentry greeted.

We found ourselves near sentry posts where the sentries were located for nightwatch.

“Where are you from?” I asked.

“I’m Choi Joo-Hee from the Lindel Clan Alliance,” said one of the sentries.

“I’m Jeon Hye-Min and I’m also from the Lindel Clan Alliance,” another sentry said.

Unfortunately, I didn’t know them.

“Would you like a cup of coffee?” I offered.

"W-we're on duty, so it’s fine!” Choi Joo-Hee exclaimed.

‘No, I’m not trying to test you guys. You don’t have to be so formal.’

“I just… want to talk to you guys for a bit,” I replied.

‘You’re really not going to talk to me?’

“But we’re currently…” Choi Joo-Hee trailed off.

‘Really?’

Everyone wanted to talk to me, and I was sure they were getting bored as well.

In the end, Jeon Hye-Min chimed in, “Let's just think of this as carrying out our mission.”

It was the perfect excuse.

“Can I ask a random and slightly strange question?” I asked.

“Sure.”

“Can you tell us why you joined the expedition?” I questioned.

It was highly likely that their superior had told them to go, but no one would say that.

No one would say, “I didn’t want to come here, but my superior told me to go, so I had no choice!”

Even if they were greedy, they also wouldn't be able to say, “It’s because I need the money! And I want to acquire powerful items, too,” unless they had a few screws loose.

As expected, the two hesitated, and they exchanged glances as if telling each other to answer me.

And that was when Jeon Hye-Min exclaimed, “Actually, I-I’m a fan of yours! That’s why!”

‘No, don’t say that. I wasn't expecting that answer.’

Choi Joo-Hee caught on to my thoughts and exclaimed, “I'm here to protect my beloved husband!”

It was the perfect answer.

“My husband is a non-combatant! The anomalies on the continent are worsening day by day, and I think it'll affect my husband someday. That’s all,” Choi Joo-Hee added.

Jeon Hye-Min finally noticed what answer I wanted to receive, and she hurriedly

shouted, “I want to protect my friends!”

I had no idea whether she was telling the truth or not, but I was sure some of the people here had that kind of mindset.

I turned to Kim Hyun-Sung and asked, “Why did you join the expedition, Mr. Hyun-Sung?

“What?”

“…”

“I-it’s to protect you, Mr. Ki-Young,” Kim Hyun-Sung answered.

'See? You’re not so different from them. Protecting the continent or for the greater good are just empty words. No one actually has such a grand goal. It’s human nature to try to protect those closest to you.'

“See, you’re fighting for others as well, Mr. Hyun-Sung. That’s what I meant about fighting for the continent,” I told him.

“…”

“Fighting for the people you love and protecting the place where they live is what it means to fight for the continent. Every single person out there has their own beloved one out there, but we’re a community that lives together,” I added.

'Protecting me means fighting for the continent, and it's all because I am *the continent.'*

“It's actually rare to find people with such lofty goals,” I said.

“…”

“You’re not selfish, Mr. Hyun-Sung. To me, you're the most selfless person ever,” I added.

He was always ready to sacrifice himself for me, so in my eyes, he was indeed the most selfless person ever.

I bowed slightly at the sentries staring at us. It was my way of thanking them for

hanging out with us. Then, I placed a finger on my lips, indicating that I wanted them to keep our conversation a secret. I smiled at the two, and they responded by nodding frantically.

They looked like they had no idea where to look.

“That was a random thought,” I commented.

“*Huh?* I—”

“I never thought you were a selfish person, Mr. Hyun-Sung. You were selfless even in the tutorial dungeon. Ordinary people would have run as soon as their second life began, as they would be afraid of dying again, but you didn’t do that,” I interrupted him.

Of course, he *did* run quite a few times in the middle of it, and it was my job to bring him back each time he ran away. To make things worse, running away was a speciality of the twenty-two-year-old Kim Hyun-Sung, but…

“I remember you staying until the end and facing your predicament,” I said.

In the end, he faced his predicament.

‘You should be proud of that.’

He'd run, but he'd never avoid it. In the end, he'd fight and overcome it.

“Actually…” I paused.

“Yes?”

“I know you've been having a hard time adapting to the new continent,” I continued.

‘I noticed that you haven’t really been able to socialize with others.’

“I’m also aware that you're not really the type of person to socialize. I think you asked me that question because you want an answer." I pointed out.

‘…’

“You’re a strong person in my eyes, Mr. Hyun-Sung. You always overcome your hardships,” I added.

‘You once overcame your nightmares and improved your mental health. And you know that the Saint of Light isn’t interested in losers, right?’

“That’s because you were next to me…” Kim Hyun-Sung muttered.

'I’m not telling you to overcome every single hardship by yourself every time.'

“I’m next to you right now, Mr. Hyun-Sung,” I said.

I made him feel relieved by saying that I'd always be with him and that I'd always support him.

Obviously, I wasn't convinced that this issue was going to be resolved anytime soon, and it was all because Kim Hyun-Sung’s condition was slightly worse than I expected.

However, I believed that he wouldn't avoid it. Rather than taking a step back, he’d take a step forward, and he'd try to shake off his nightmares rather than stew in anxiety over it.

“I see…” Kim Hyun-Sung mumbled.

I wasn’t sure whether it helped him or not, but Kim Hyun-Sung smiled.

Soon, it was morning. We couldn’t see the sky since we were inside the dungeon, but there was a *swoosh*, and I saw Kim Hyun-Sung spreading his wings. It didn’t take long for the sunset to illuminate the dungeon, and I soon felt like I was watching the sun rise.

‘The atmosphere is so nice.’

“I think I can overcome it,” Kim Hyun-Sung said.

Perhaps it was just me, but his words just now sounded like a red flag.

‘I suddenly think that he won’t be able to overcome it… ’

'Something bad always happens after heartwarming moments like this… '

“I won’t disappoint you,” Kim Hyun-Sung said.

For some reason, I had a feeling that I was going to get disappointed.

‘Just stop talking, man.’

“I’ll move… one step forward,” Kim Hyun-Sung added.

CHAPTER 960
ITEM DISTRIBUTION (1)

“I’ll move… one step forward,” Kim Hyun-Sung said.

‘I feel like something is going to happen… ’

“You don’t have to be hasty about it, Mr. Hyun-Sung,” I told him.

'I feel like something bad is going to happen if you go about it hastily.''

“I think it’s best to try it when you’re ready to take a step forward. For now, just do the best that you can,” I advised.

“Okay, Mr. Ki-Young. Thank you… for the advice,” Kim Hyun-Sung said.

I wasn’t sure whether he actually understood my advice or not, but a morning that would put an end to my anxiety dawned beneath Kim Hyun-Sung’s sunset.

Naturally, I heard murmurs everywhere. It was still early, but some people realized that Kim Hyun-Sung and I were already awake. Those worried about our reaction got up and started working.

‘They’re pretty fast.’

As always, morning was the busiest time of the day for adventurers.

The majority of the adventurers preferred to work whenever the sun was up. There were many reasons for that, but it was basically for their safety. Some of those reasons varied from the visibility or the working hours of the temple priests, but safety was the biggest reason.

That was why there was an unwritten rule in many places about how preparations for an expedition had to be done early in the morning.

‘Are they competing to see who wakes up earlier?’

There was a saying about how the early bird would get the worm, and it applied here.

They could claim hunting grounds, accept quests first, and carry out missions first. It would also increase their chance of encountering a monster. Basically, they could be one step ahead of their competitors, and the expedition members here were all one step ahead of everyone out there.

They cleaned up the camp and ate some jerky or bread for breakfast, even though I gave them enough time to eat. The assigned supply unit moved another step forward. They had woken up a while ago and were preparing to serve breakfast to the adventurers.

Normally, I wasn't the type to wake up early, but it wasn't bad to do it once in a while.

'I should start a little early.'

My day had started a while ago, but I pretended like I was just getting started as I drank some coffee.

"I look forward to working with you today as well," I said to Kim Hyun-Sung.

"Me, too," Kim Hyun-Sung said.

'All right.'

"You don't have to take what I said today to heart. Well then…" I told him.

"Okay."

"Shall we start the meeting, then? *Ah!* I'll have a light meal during the meeting," I said.

"*Ah…*"

'You don't want to? That's too bad.'

The busy atmosphere *did* have an effect, but it really wasn't because of the atmosphere.

'I'm curious about the results.'

I wanted to know Gelk's loot. I was sure the appraisers of the expedition group had already appraised them, but I still couldn't see the loot, and it was all thanks to this guy—Kim Hyun-Sung.

Everyone around us was busy, but it seemed like he really wanted to enjoy his food. I wanted to relax with a cup of coffee as well, but my idea of a break was working, so I decided to check Gelk's loot.

Actually, it had been a while since I detached from things like items and money, but I was still really greedy. I wanted nice things and more gold. I wish this was mine, and I wish that was mine. I wanted everything.

"I'll check the byproducts and items that Gelk had dropped. I want all staffers, including the commanders, to come to the mobile meeting room… Actually, I'll tell Miss Floretta myself," I said.

"Okay, Mr. Ki-Young," Kim Hyun-Sung said.

I headed toward the mobile meeting room. I thought I got here pretty quickly, but I saw people in the room.

'How did you guys get here so fast?'

Did they even sleep? It seemed like they had been waiting for us while fully armed.

I wondered whether all of them were awake when Kim Hyun-Sung and I were talking while circling around the camp. I liked that they were disciplined, but it was really amusing.

Perhaps they were impressed by how I controlled Kim Hyun-Sung yesterday. I assumed they felt my charisma when I used my almighty power to remove the strike squad leader from his position.

I decided to look stern, but it didn't take long for me to realize that I was being inconsiderate.

"Let's start from the regular situation report," I ordered.

“Okay. The first strike squad has joined the second and third strike squads. They entered the eighth floor and are resting at the moment,” Floretta reported.

I thought they were on the fifth floor…

“Yesterday morning, the boss monsters of the sixth and seventh floor, Executor Sarlax and Tormentor Achellie, were defeated.

"There were six casualties, many were injured, and they’re going to focus on treating the injured, so they’re going to take a one-day break. The supply unit has requested rum and beer. The request is waiting… for your approval—”

“Reject it,” I interrupted.

“Commander Jin wants to treat the hardworking strike squad members—”

“We’re still inside a dungeon, after all. I understand that they are inside a safe zone that they had created, and I understand that he wants to reward his squad members for their effort, but they have yet to investigate the eighth floor nor acquire samples of the monsters there…

"It can be said that they're still in danger. Think about it… what they want to do is dangerous," I explained.

“There are some casualties, and the squad members are exhausted. Commander, we should at least—”

“I will not allow it. I’m sure there are other ways to reward the squad members for their hard work. Don’t you agree?” I asked.

“Yes… y-you’re right,” Floretta responded.

'How dare you even think about drinking rum and beer inside a holy temple? That’s ridiculous.'

I could hear someone swearing at me, but for the sake of law and order, I couldn’t allow it. If something bad were to happen, I'd definitely feel so guilty about it that I wouldn't be able to sleep.

“Next is the sixth strike squad,” Floretta continued.

“Okay.”

“Mr. Elias, the strike squad leader of the sixth squad, is still recovering. He’s recovering, but he’s no longer physically fit to lead a strike squad, so they’re looking into regrouping with the main force,” Floretta said.

"That report is from Miss Hye-Jin, right?” I asked.

“Yes, I received the report from her,” Floretta replied.

“I think it’s best if the sixth strike squad joins the main force. Please send them the rendezvous coordinates,” I ordered.

“Understood,” Floretta said.

“Anything else?” I asked.

“I-I do, Father Lee Ki-Young. It’s… about Gelk's loots…” Floretta answered.

“*Ah!*”

'Looking at their faces, I finally understood why they were up so early.'

‘They have been waiting for this.’

“I see. I would like to see the items first. Have the items been sorted?"

“It’s done, Mr. Lee Ki-Young. We sorted them out into two categories—items that can be used right away and items that can be used as samples. Additionally, items that can be used right away were sorted based on rarity…” Floretta explained.

“I see,” I commented.

"And this file contains a report about the contributions made by each clan, guild, and individual,” Floretta informed me, and I saw numbers before my eyes.

“It is presumptuous of me, but each clan and guild had created a list of the items that they wanted. It would be great if you could take note of that,” she requested.

‘How long have they been waiting for this?’

It was like they settled all of their affairs before coming here for this.

Perhaps I made these greedy and avaricious bastards wait for too long.

‘They must’ve been feeling really anxious.’

I realized that I was being inconsiderate of them. They had to have been really anxious while waiting for me to make a decision. They had been waiting to see whether they would be rewarded for their hard work, and they all looked like puppies wanting to go pee.

I was very certain that there wasn't a person alive who wouldn't want items that would boost their strength.

I had a non-combatant job, but the majority of the people here were the opposite. High-quality items could increase their survivability and raise their strength by a rank or perhaps even two ranks.

The Blue Guild had plenty of treasures, so Legendary items could no longer catch the Blue Guild's attention, but it was different for these ordinary adventurers.

A powerful item could increase a clan or guild's fame, and items were the reason why they were even here. It wasn’t the best example, but many people cared about their public image, so I was sure they were excited to see Gelk's loot.

The problem was that they could only see them, and it was my job to distribute them.

There were so many groups here, so these drops would become the seeds of conflict.

Of course, it was customary for people like the strike squad leader to distribute the items, and we had never really discussed the loot distribution, so it wouldn't be strange if we went for the default distribution.

‘Something good must’ve dropped.’

These warriors had gathered upon being asked to work for the sake of the continent, but none of them actually wanted to work for free.

“Is this all?” I asked.

“There are more, Mr. Lee Ki-Young,” Floretta replied.

Spirit Gelk had assimilated monsters on his way to the top, so I was sure that he had left behind a ton of loot.

“There's quite a lot of them,” I commented.

I was sure they had been wanting to talk about these items since yesterday. They wanted to ask what they were supposed to do with them, but Kim Hyun-Sung and I had ended up arguing.

Since the atmosphere was tense, no one had the courage to ask. After all, none of them wanted to get involved…

‘These guys… ’

I could always take these items away and tell them that the temple needed them, but…

‘I need to be generous.’

It would be helpful morale-wise.

“For the sake of a smooth raid… I think it’s best if we distribute these items now,” I suggested.

“Thank you for making that decision,” Floretta said.

“I feel kind of bad for saying this, but I don’t think each clan and guild will get all the items that they want to obtain,” I told her.

“I understand,” she said.

“I’ll make sure to distribute them fairly based on their contributions and compatibility,” I added.

“…”

“Looks like the atmosphere got tense. You guys look more serious than when you were fighting Gelk. Please listen to me while sipping on your tea. You may not like

what's going to happen, but we'll distribute the items as fast and as simple as possible. I'll allow each group to object once," I informed.

'But that doesn't mean I'll accept your objection.'

"Okay."

"Understood."

"Let's take care of the easy ones first. They're items from the boss monsters that Gelk had absorbed rather than from Gelk himself.

"The first one is Helmet of Palt. It's a Legendary item that redirects a certain amount of damage dealt to the wearer to the helmet. This will go to the Clan Union, which is eleventh on the contribution list. Additionally, I'll give them Palt's Flag as well. Any objections?" I asked.

"…"

"None."

"…"

"If there are no objections, we'll continue with the distribution. The Clan Union will decide the ownership of the item," I added.

"Thank you!"

'Yeah, those items are enough for you guys. Helmet of Palt is kind of lacking, but Palt's Flag gives an AoE buff, so it should be useful.'

I was sure adventurers who were slightly more powerful had their eyes on different items. For example…

[Checking Semi-Mythic Spirit Gelk's Boots.]

This one.

'This is such a good item.'

“I would like this item, Mr. Ki-Young,” Kim Hyun-Sung chimed in.

He had been quiet all this while, but he suddenly placed his hand on the table.

I wanted to cheer because it meant that he had finally taken a step forward in the right direction.

'Did he speak up to get himself a gift?' I assumed, but he wasn't talking about Spirit Gelk's Boots.

[Spirit Gelk’s Messenger Bag - Legendary]

“It’s a nice bag,” Kim Hyun-Sung remarked.

“…”

'This crazy bastard… '

CHAPTER 961
ITEM DISTRIBUTION (2)

'I really want to hit him. I want to flick his forehead.'

"Will you really be okay with that?" I asked.

The people sitting at the table smiled.

It seemed that they were imagining something good.

They were probably imagining themselves acquiring the Semi-Mythic item. An item like that ought to belong to the Blue Guild, and there was no need to calculate the contributions, as the Blue Guild would definitely be at the top.

Park Deok-Gu was the main tank, Han Sora ensured that Gelk would not be able to recover at all, Jung Ha-Yan bombarded Gelk with her powerful spells, and Kim Hyun-Sung sliced up the other entities like tofu. The remaining guild members also showed an impressive performance compared to the other adventurers.

Kim Hyun-Sung's declaration that he would like the bag made it seem like the Blue Guild was willing to give up on the Semi-Mythic item. The Blue Guild was a major guild with an excellent public image, and it was known for having friendly policies toward small and medium-sized clans and guilds.

"Thank you very much, Guild Master."

"As expected from the Blue Guild…"

"Thank you for being considerate."

'Stop with the nonsense.'

"Would you like to see it, Mr. Ki-Young?" Kim Hyun-Sung asked.

'Get that bad away from me, you psycho.'

“Any item inside the bag will never suffer any damage to their durability. It's one of the bag's effects,” Kim Hyun-Sung added.

‘Seriously, go away.’

“It’s not that big, but it's not that small, either…” Kim Hyun-Sung continued.

‘Crazy bastard.’

“It'll be great to have this kind of bag in dungeons. It’s practical… It also has a vintage, yet luxurious feel to it,” Kim Hyun-Sung said.

‘Just shut up.’

“So you bid to give it to him as a gift. Congratulations on obtaining a great bag, Commander,” Floretta said.

“It’s kind of reassuring to see that you two are still on good terms. The atmosphere between you two wasn’t that great yesterday… so we were kind of worried… *Hahaha*,” an adventurer said.

“…”

“We heard that you have a few hobbies, Commander… and that seems to be true. My fiancée has the same hobby as yours. Could you show us your collection one day?” asked the same adventurer.

‘This isn't my hobby, you fools.’

“Congratulations!”

The atmosphere was improving, and it was getting positive to the point that the tense mood earlier felt like it had never happened at all.

I really wanted to say, “The Blue Guild is not giving up any items. We’re going to take this, that, and that one over there,” but it was getting harder to say that.

Under everyone's gaze, Kim Hyun-Sung gave me the bag.

The bag looked like a vintage item, but the material wasn’t bad, and it looked like it

was made to withstand dangerous situations rather than a daily driver. I actually liked it. I did have a few expedition bags, but Chanelia Hermes wasn't exactly made for expeditions.

"Try it out," Kim Hyun-Sung said.

"Yes, Commander. Try it."

The female managers looked at me as if they really wanted me to try the bag out. When I accepted the gift awkwardly, I heard people clapping around me.

'Damn it, I want to get out of here. I want to throw this bag—no, I want to throw a chair at his face and run out.'

"It looks good on you, Mr. Ki-Young," he commented.

"T-Thank you," I said.

'How should I say it? Would it be better if I just ignore their requests and say the boots are ours as well?'

The problem was that I needed to protect my honor as the honorary cardinal. In addition, greed was bad for the Saint of Light's image. In the end, I had no choice but to look at Park Deok-Gu.

'I trust you.'

I wanted to see him stand up and shout, "Boots!"

Unfortunately, he was too busy eating his snacks.

'From now on, I'm going to get rid of all snacks during meetings.'

I tried to execute my next contingency plan and glanced at Han Sora, but she intentionally avoided my gaze, which made me think that she wasn't going to help me at all.

'What's wrong with her… '

I had to find another way, so I faked my smile.

At a glance, it seemed like nothing, but those familiar with my real smile would know that this wasn't my *real* smile. It was a smile to move on to the next subject. Obviously, my target was Kim Hyun-Sung, and things would be easier if I made him look like a crazy bastard.

"Do you like it?" he asked.

As expected, he was waiting for my reaction.

Of course, I nodded as if I was telling him that I was grateful and that I liked it.

'I do like it… but I don't think I'll be carrying a lot of stuff.'

I didn't tell him my true feelings.

'I'll store it for now since it really is helpful during expeditions. I'll probably use it a lot more if I had the boots to match.'

I liked matching my bag and boots.

I felt bad, but this was normal for those with this kind of hobby.

'Come to think of it, it's about time I change my boots. The boots I wear for expeditions are all old, and they hurt my feet… '

The worried Kim Hyun-Sung cast a surprised gaze at me.

I looked at him and "smiled" again.

"I… really like it. Thank you," I said.

"*Hahaha.* I'm glad to hear that you like it, Commander. Now, how about we continue with the item distribution?" an adventurer suggested.

"Wait…" Kim Hyun-Sung said.

"…"

"And…" Kim Hyun-Sung trailed off.

“*Huh?* Guild master?”

“And… Gelk’s Boots. We’ll take that as well,” Kim Hyun-Sung added.

“…”

“…”

‘You adorable fool!’

Kim Hyun-Sung was a crazy fool.

I had never seen someone so shameless to say something like that in this kind of situation. I knew Kim Hyun-Sung hadn't been able to adjust to life in society, but he wasn't actually dumb.

He was having a hard time getting along with people, but I was sure he at least had the ability to read the room.

Unfortunately, he didn't read the room. As if he were a new recruit, he announced confidently that he was going to leave for home, even though everyone was going to stay and work overtime.

“What?” I asked.

Of course, we had the right to take it.

It just didn’t make sense that the Blue Guild would back off after taking just one item.

“We have the right to take it, Mr. Ki-Young,” Kim Hyun-Sung said.

“…”

“We should definitely take that item. Just think about our contributions to the fight. I understand that you’re trying to be considerate of other guilds, clans, and expedition members. I also understand that you want to distribute the items objectively and fairly as their leader, but you don’t have to be considerate all the time.

"I’m… I’m the guild master of our group, and the Blue Guild has contributed a lot in the fight, so we deserve to get this reward,” Kim Hyun-Sung explained.

‘Since when did he get so good at talking?’

“…”

“…”

“Y-You’re right, Master,” Floretta said.

“I won’t apologize for what I said, everyone,” Kim Hyun-Sung said.

“*Haha*. You don’t need to apologize for anything,” an adventurer said.

“But Mr. Hyun-Sung…”

“Right now, I’m talking as the Guild Master of the Blue Guild, not as the leader of a strike squad, Mr. Ki-Young. If you're going to allow it… I’ll formally claim ownership of Spirit Gelk’s Boots,” Kim Hyun-Sung declared.

‘He’s like a runaway train that just can't be stopped.’

I made eye contact with the other expedition members as if I was trying to tell them that I wanted to give them the item, but I simply couldn't do anything about it. I was worried that they might react negatively, but they all seemed like they understood my feelings.

“We’re fine with that. We would feel uncomfortable if fewer items were distributed to the Blue Guild, Commander,” an adventurer said.

Who could go against Hyun-Sung’s words? Sometimes, it was best to be stubborn and push through with your opinion. Thankfully, the meeting went a lot smoother from then on.

“Marlemonroe’s Ceremonial Dagger… will go to the Lime Guild,” I announced.

“Thank you.”

“I think it’s best if the Underground Order of the Holy Knights’ Radiant Shield is given to the Beast Guild. They have a strong vanguard, after all.” I suggested.

“We’ll do our best to fulfill our mission.”

No one objected to my decisions, even though my way of distributing the items was different from how items were normally distributed. Even if the items were distributed fairly, there would always be those who'd object and talk nonsense.

That was exactly why I couldn't help but nod in satisfaction when these people simply accepted what they were given without any word of complaint.

“The remaining are monster samples and items that are hard to appraise. The samples will be handed over to the researchers. The items that can’t be used right now will be stored for the time being,” I instructed.

“Understood.”

“Please prepare for the next leg of the expedition. We’ll join the sixth strike squad. We’re going to head to the ninth floor as fast as possible,” I added.

“Yes, Commander.”

The expedition group was done with their preparations. As soon as I exited the tent, I saw people getting ready, and I saw the palanquin in the distance. Before I could walk into the palanquin, I heard a voice calling for me.

“Mr. Ki-Young!" Kim Hyun-Sung called out.

“Yes?”

“I’m sorry… for disappointing you just now,” Kim Hyun-Sung said.

“…”

“But these boots—”

“That’s yours, Mr. Hyun-Sung,” I interrupted.

“What?”

“You should use that item. It suits you better, Mr. Hyun-Sung,” I said.

“B-But…”

“I’m not trying to be sarcastic here…” I told him.

“…”

“I really want you to use it,” I added.

“What?”

“It’s my gift to you,” I said.

I didn’t buy it nor did I earn it, but I wanted to show it off.

I smiled at Kim Hyun-Sung, who was staring at me with a dumbfounded face as if he were a broken robot.

“Thank you,” Kim Hyun-Sung said.

‘Just listen to me and you’ll profit like this.’

'Do you understand?'

“Thank you, Mr. Ki-Young,” Kim Hyun-Sung repeated.

“…”

“…”

And…

[Secret Report About the Mole Saint]

[Document Written by Spirit Gelk]

[Templar Training Experiment Report]

[Underground Gathering Invitation]

I examined the rest of the items that we had obtained from Gelk.

Underground Gathering Invitation

We'd like to thank everyone who has been supporting the Underground Temple and has been keeping our existence a secret all this while.

To show our gratitude, we prepared a gathering just for you. We hope to discuss our future with those who have been doing their best to protect the continent.

May the infinite glory of the God of Light be with all the attendees.

We hope that you'll attend and grace us with your presence.

[Would you like to accept the invitation?]

Obviously, I immediately put away the invitation.

'What the hell was that?'

I could still remember seeing blood upon accepting an invitation like this before…

CHAPTER 962
RESULTS (1)

I was kind of surprised.

I thought I'd find nothing but useless documents. Clearly, I was mistaken, as we picked up this item as well. It was just more than a hint on how to clear the dungeon. It could actually affect our strategy.

I had no idea how to use it or if it was just exactly what it seemed, but it was very useful.

[Underground Gathering Invitation]

'Can I consider it as a way to travel back in time?'

I wasn't sure exactly when the gathering had taken place, but if this was an invitation to a gathering in the past, then it would have a direct effect on the raid. The attendees of this gathering…

'They're probably the named bosses of the Cozy Sanctuary… '

I could attend the gathering and find out more information about the named bosses before we actually encountered them. That way, we'd be able to categorize them and make the appropriate preparations to face them.

I'd also be able to make a map of the dungeon and find out the exact clear conditions.

I might be able to locate more hidden bosses and perhaps even easter eggs.

'This is the key.'

Of course, we could clear the dungeon without using it, as the same thing had happened at the Cursed Shrine. Defeating the hidden boss, Gedric, was a prerequisite, but we still managed to clear the dungeon by defeating Juliena.

In other words, the Underground Gathering Invitation was a key to one of the endings.

“I don’t think I need to use it right now.”

It was only right for me to use this, as I already had it in my mind, but I felt worried about the idea of actually using it.

After all, even a child would know how the people here would react if I were to suddenly disappear in this mysterious dungeon.

It wouldn't matter if the flow of time there was different from the flow of time here, but things would become problematic otherwise.

Kim Hyun-Sung's mental illness would activate once again. Jung Ha-Yan and the other guild members would surely become anxious, thinking that Gelk's remarks about the so-called "advent of the saint" were actually true.

The strike squad's mood would get ruined, and Kim Hyun-Sung would cry and kick up a big fuss.

He had already recognized his problems and had resolved to overcome them step by step instead of running away from them.

Kim Hyun-Sung’s mental health was really important.

If he crumbled down again, I wouldn't be able to see him live a healthy life. He'd live a paranoid life, and his nightmare would become even more outrageous. There was also a chance that it'd become something bizarre and terrifying at the same time.

‘This is ridiculous… It'll be really problematic.’

Unfortunately, I couldn't tell him about this. And it wasn't just that—I couldn't tell anyone else as well, as I would not be satisfied with sending someone else to participate in my stead.

If this were a religious event instead of a social gathering, I'd send someone else, but the implications of the event were clear, so I would never be satisfied unless the participant was either myself, Commander Jin, or Ji-Hye noona.

If I handed over the invitation to Kim Hyun-Sung…

‘U-u-u-um, I’m Kim… Hyun-Sung. It’s nice to meet you. That's the end of it.’

The first thing I needed to find out was the difficulty of this dungeon. It would be great if the expedition remained as smooth as it was right now, but we had to be prepared for a difficulty spike.

"Commander."

—…

"Commander? I’m sorry for asking this all of a sudden… but what do you think about this dungeon?"

—…

"Hey, Commander."

—…

"I’ll give you the supplies you want, so say something, will you? I’m telling you this in case you’re suspicious of me, but I didn’t reject your request to make you look bad. I mean, just think about it. Isn't it strange to drink beer and rum inside a dungeon?"

— It’s the duty of the commander to praise his hardworking soldiers. I wasn’t going to drink alcohol myself, you idiot. And I'm the commander here, so I’m the one who gets to decide whether we're safe enough to do something or not.

— I'm actually here, after all, unlike a certain someone who has been sitting comfortably in a palanquin and has been doing nothing but sip on wine.

‘He sounds a bit bitter and downtrodden.'

'I don’t think I’ve ever seen him look happy, but he looks even more downtrodden than usual. I had an idea why he looks like that.'

‘They're really fast at clearing floors.’

Commander Jin and his strike squad cleared the sixth and seventh floors while we

were resting, so they were *really* fast.

I was sure he motivated everyone by saying that they'd take a break after clearing the eighth floor, and he'd prepare drinks and meat for everyone to consume as gratitude for their hard work.

All of a sudden, I recalled a certain general's line in a drama I had watched a few times before.

In the end, they reached the eighth floor and fulfilled their goal, but the drinks and meat that he had promised did not arrive.

The headquarters did not send the supplies that he had requested, and it wasn't like he could make liquor and meat out of nothing. Inevitably, the soldiers would lose morale, and their trust in their commander would go down.

"Looks like there's a misunderstanding between us."

— Misunderstanding? Are you seriously…

"Ah, I'm really *not trying to bring you down."*

'Just kidding, I'm trying to bring you down.'

"I'll send out the requested supplies with some reinforcement, so just relax in that safe zone. I'm a commander as well, so I can't just stand by and ignore Commander Jin's request when he has contributed a lot to the expedition

"I'll give you whatever you want, so tell me what you want."

— Just keep your word and send those supplies.

"Yes, of course. But what do you really think about this dungeon, Commander? I want to know what you think about the difficulty."

—…

"…"

— I don't know what kind of answer you're looking for.

"What?"

— If I tell you that the difficulty is low, will you not work as hard? Dumbass.

"What are you saying all of a sudden?"

— There's no such thing as a *safe* expedition. We have to always move while thinking about the worst-case scenario. Otherwise, those with faith in you will die, you incompetent fool.

"…"

"You no longer sound bitter."

—…

— Just think about the desperate times you spent in a dungeon back then, and you'll realize how stupid your question is.

'Stop criticizing your rival with those cliched lines, man. You're losing, anyway, so why so serious?'

"I understand what you're saying."

— Keep your promise.

"I will."

— *Ah!* I'm in the lead with 1,000 points, by the way.

'See, this idiot is really evil. He sees people as nothing more than chess pieces, but I understand what he's trying to say.'

Of course, a few casualties were inevitable, but they were basically honorable deaths.

Personally, there were times when I thought he'd become a bit more open-minded, but it was more like he became relaxed upon taking care of all of his tasks and completing his homework.

The Mole Saint's Cozy Sanctuary was not an ordinary dungeon, but it wasn't as

dangerous as the Outer Gods War or the Continental War. Spirit Gelk was too easy for a hidden boss, and the competent members were taking care of their tasks without me giving out any orders.

It was pretty systematic.

It felt like Commander Jin had spouted a bunch of nonsense over some supplies, so I got annoyed. However, his words were worth considering.

Anyway, I decided to open another item.

[Templar Training Experimental Report]

What was this one like?

The Templars were weakening because the Mole Saint was weakening. The Templars tried their best to preserve their powers through various means, but they couldn't stop the loss of power.

I had no idea why, but the majority of the Templars had lost all of their powers.

They could no longer fight demons like they used to do, and they had been reduced to mere ordinary holy knights. Only eight Templars managed to stop their power from disappearing along with the Mole Saint's power.

They were worried, but they were not worried about the continent.

When their numbers dwindled to seven, they gathered and consumed the Mole Saint's blood. The results were promising, but some of them could not handle the Mole Saint's immense power and died.

In the end, only four of them remained, and they were the chosen ones.

Yeah, they thought they only managed to come this far because they were the chosen.

The power that Mole Saint's blood had bestowed upon them was a unique power, entirely different from the power they had prior to drinking the Mole Saint's blood, and they all believed that they deserved it.

Only four had the power that the Templars desired, so they definitely felt like they were

gods—no, they were definitely gods at the time. Unfortunately, the Templars became old. It was unknown whether it was due to a side effect from drinking her blood or not, but the four Templars became old.

One of them was worried, seemingly afraid of returning to dust, but the Mole Saint's power weakened, and they quickly grew old.

One of them was worried about the continent upon their deaths, and he said that they needed to train new Templars and successors to follow in their footsteps. He brought over a child from the Order and made him drink the Mole Saint's blood.

However, the child died. He could not handle the Mole Saint's diluted blood.

One of them wanted to be free. He had accepted the fact that he had gotten old, but couldn't let go of his yearning of wanting to live the life he wanted to live. He argued that the key figures of the Order on the surface had to be protected.

It seemed that he really valued his life.

I'm scared and nervous as well. I'm scared of death, and it's heartbreaking that I'm going to die before I can witness the end. I want to live forever. I want to keep living—omitted.

As the years passed, an anxious Templar remarked, "Why are we growing old? Our powers are so strong and glorious, so why are our fleshly bodies so weak?

The soul and the body are separate.

The body is nothing but a vessel that carries our soul, which contains our essence.

The Templar, who longed for freedom, was puzzled, but I understood what the anxious Templar was trying to say.

Our body is nothing more than a vessel for our soul. If we can find a vessel suitable for us, then we can have eternal life. And we can once again…

The next report is about our test subjects… who may hopefully become our vessels…

"*AAAH!*"

"*Ah*—shit! You scared me!" I exclaimed and turned to where the scream had come from.

I saw Kasugano Yuno looking at me with pitch-black eyes, and her eyes reflected the figures of Kim Hyun-Sung, Jung Ha-Yan, and the Blue Guild members. Shockingly, each and every one of them was… headless.

"It's dangerous, Master," Kasugano Yuno said.

"…"

"It's dangerous," Kasugano Yuno repeated.

It was a ridiculous sight.

CHAPTER 963
RESULTS (2)

Kasugano Yuno did not have to say that it was dangerous for me to know that it was indeed dangerous. The scene playing out before me was pretty unrealistic.

'What is this… '

I was at a loss for words.

I saw my babies sprawled out on the ground in the dark ruins.

It wasn't just my babies.

The expedition group had been annihilated.

The banners of the guilds and clans were all over the ground, along with their corpses. I couldn't see it, but I was sure Commander Jin's corpse was here as well. Of course, my interest was elsewhere. Their lives were none of my concern and whether Commander Jin was alive or not wasn't important.

My babies were missing their heads.

In addition, the pig's corpse was a complete mess compared to the rearguards. His right arm was on the ground, but his left arm was still holding a shield. I was sure he had received the most attacks before dying, and it made sense because he was the main tank.

Jung Ha-Yan was dead as well. Her head was ghastly white, and it was all because she had squeezed every single drop of her mana. I thought her mana would never run out, and even if she could run out of mana, I never expected that it could happen, but the sight before me betrayed my thoughts.

Han Sora was hugging Jung Ha-Yan, and there were arrows sticking out of her. I looked around and found the rearguards. It seemed that they were taken out with one attack.

Sun Hee-Young, Elena, and Hwang Jung-Yeon were dead. I wasn't sure whether they couldn't respond to the ambush or if they simply had no time to dodge.

Ahn Ki-Mo and Yoo Ah-Young, the peelers of the Blue Guild's rearguards, seemed to have lasted longer than them, but they still couldn't handle the next wave of enemies.

Belier and Alps were dead as well.

I looked around and couldn't see Kim Ye-Ri, Lee Chang-Ryeol, Park Lian, and the rangers.

They were part of the scout team, so it was highly likely that they died somewhere during their reconnaissance mission.

As for Kim Hyun-Sung…

Kim Hyun-Sung was on the ground, and his torn wings were next to him.

Swords and spears were sticking out of him, and he clearly died to protect me.

The sight reminded me of the Outer Gods War. To make things worse, I couldn't see his head. Inside the world depicted in Kasugano Yuno's eyes, I… saw a headless Kim Hyun-Sung.

I heard a *swoosh*, and the background peeled away.

I was back inside my spacious palanquin, but I couldn't calm down at all.

Kasugano Yuno's breathing was uneven, and she was crying while staring at me. I shook my head, but the scenes that had been burned into my brain wouldn't go away.

'Hee-Ra noon and Yuno… they must have died as well.'

The strike squads were annihilated, and the expedition ended in a disaster.

Everyone was cornered to the point of no return. In the final battle, they gave it their all, but they were destroyed. I wasn't sure how the battle even started, but that detail wasn't important right now.

What mattered was the fact that the difference in power had to have been massive.

'This palanquin is kind of suffocating.'

I opened the window to look out and saw soldiers marching outside. Everything was still normal. Jung Ha-Yan and Han Sora were moving with the palanquin; Ahn Ki-Mo and Elena were talking to each other. I couldn't really see him, but I could hear Park Deok-Gu.

"This is what hyung-nim said to me back then—'If I can do it… you can do better, Deok-Gu. I trust you.' Honestly, I didn't really understand it back then, but I think that incident has changed my mindset. I realized that I could do it… that I could grow even stronger."

"*Ah…* I had no idea that happened to you, Mr. Park."

"It's true! It's all thanks to him that I managed to grow this big," Park Deok-Gu said.

They were so talkative.

It seemed that Park Deok-Gu had already gotten close to the tanks of the other guilds.

Sun Hee-Young seemed to have noticed me staring outside.

"Sub Guild Master?"

"Yes, Miss Hee-Young?" I answered.

"Are you okay?" Sun Hee-Young asked.

"*Huh?* What do you…" I trailed off. "…Actually, we shouldn't be talking about this. Could you call over Mr. Hyun-Sung for me?"

"Yes, sir. Please wait…" Sun Hee-Young said.

"Okay."

Soon, Kim Hyun-Sung approached me.

"I heard you called for me, Mr. Ki-Young? Is something wrong?" Kim Hyun-Sung asked.

'I should take care of this first.'

“Please cancel all the reconnaissance missions assigned to Park Lian, Lee Chang-Ryeol, and Kim Ye-Ri,” I ordered.

“Excuse me?”

“Don’t assign any missions until I give you instructions,” I added.

“Did they do something that deserves punishment? I understand Mr. Chang-Ryeol, but Ye-Ri—”

“No, it’s nothing like that. It’s not a punishment… I want you to inform them that there’s something else I want them to do,” I interrupted.

“Okay, I’ll do that. But… are you… okay right now… Mr. Ki-Young?” Kim Hyun-Sung asked.

‘Why is everyone asking me that?’

“What?”

“You don’t look so good. If you’re feeling unwell, how about we take a break?” Kim Hyun-Sung suggested.

“No, I feel fine. I just don’t want to delay things any longer,” I rejected.

When I looked at myself in the mirror, I saw that my eyes and hands were trembling. I took a deep breath and felt like everything was returning to normal, but the distracting thoughts in my head wouldn’t go away.

I found it ridiculous how I had basically become Kim Hyun-Sung upon waking up from a nightmare. I exhaled and felt a bit calmer, so I looked at Kim Hyun-Sung once again.

“Anyway, exclude those three from all reconnaissance missions and… as I always say, safety is our top priority.”

“Right. You don’t have to worry about the expedition team’s safety…” Kim Hyun-Sung reassured me.

“No, I’m talking about you and the guild members rather than the expedition team. Safety has to be the top priority during a raid. I’ll say it again, but the top priority is safety,” I repeated.

“Okay.”

“Then…”

“I’ll let you know when we’re getting close to the sixth strike squad's camp. Anyway, Mr. Ki-Young…” Kim Hyun-Sung trailed off.

I wanted to comfort him somehow, but I couldn’t think of what to say to him. I was sure that this wasn’t enough, but I used my finger and tapped my eye. He seemed kind of surprised, but he smiled and nodded.

“Okay.”

“Don’t forget,” I said.

“I’ll never forget,” Kim Hyun-Sung said.

“Do not forget it,” I repeated.

“Okay.”

With that, I closed the window and decided to create new protocols.

We had been moving with safety in mind, but the situation had just gotten worse, so I had to create new ones.

‘Damn it.’

However, I still couldn’t understand it. I don’t know about the others, but I couldn’t imagine something happening to Kim Hyun-Sung, Jung Ha-Yan, and Cha Hee-Ra.

These three were superhumans.

They were a bit lacking in my eyes, but they were strong enough to be called demigods.

When it came to raw power, they were on the same level as the beings up there. I also felt relieved by their achievement, as I assumed that there wasn't anything here that could harm them.

'It really is hard for me to understand… '

However, what I had seen was going to happen.

Spirit Gelk's loots had told me that there was a big difference between the Templars of the current era and the Templars back then. They both drank the Mole Saint's blood, but Gen and Simon were only half as powerful as them.

I also felt like Gen and Simon were nothing more than the vessels of the real Templars.

'They're preparing the vessels.'

The experiment report did not mention whether they had successfully taken over the bodies of the vessels, but I was sure that it was all because the experiment was still ongoing.

It was hard to say that they were successful. After all, the Templars familiar to me were only on the same level as the Eight Seats, which meant that they were too weak to contain the souls of those who were basically gods.

I had no idea about the process, but I was sure that the details were already in the Templars' heads, and they were simply waiting for their bodies to ripen for the picking. It hadn't been that long since the Templars obtained wings, but the existence of their wings meant that they were ready for the picking.

I also felt like that was one of the reasons the strike squads were annihilated.

The old spirits took over the bodies of the innocent Gen and the wicked Simon. There was one person I had yet to see, and the one who had written that report had succeeded in taking over a body.

I couldn't determine their exact strength, but they were probably just as strong as our Hyun-Sung. In the worst-case scenario, they were stronger than Kim Hyun-Sung, Jung Ha-Yan, and Cha Hee-Ra.

‘Damn it, Benigoa… ’

Well, I couldn't really blame her. This was inevitable. Things would have been more difficult if I hadn't discovered it so early.

I understood her, but…

'I’m sure there’s a reason behind your actions and maybe you were even forbidden from doing certain things, but if things still go wrong, I’m going to blame you. Keep this in mind. You’ll be responsible for it.'

“Mr. Lee Ki-Young… are you okay?” Floretta asked.

“…” “Mr. Lee Ki-Young?” Floretta called out.

“Yes, I’m fine. Is there anything else you need to report?” I asked.

“I don’t. I’m sorry,” Floretta replied.

“You don’t have to feel sorry since I was already aware. I asked just in case… Anyway, take this,” I said.

“What?”

“Upon meeting with the sixth strike squad, please deliver this to Hye-Jin. When you regroup with the first strike squad, deliver this one to Commander Jin.

"There are many things that need to be changed, but they’ll take care of everything.

"It’s the same for you, Miss Yuno. Safety is the top priority. This letter is for Ha-Yan and Sora, while this letter is for Lee Ji-Hye of the Black Swan Guild. I have a letter for Hee-Ra noona as well. If I end up disappearing, I want you to show this to Hyun-Sung immediately. They might become suspicious of Miss Yuno, so—”

“What are you talking about?” Floretta interrupted me.

I had many things to take with me. A small alchemy kit, potions, catalysts, and Gelk's loots. I stuffed my bag with things I’d need, but I would be sad if I actually had to use them.

I needed clothes as well.

'I can't go to a social gathering looking like this.'

Religious figures would probably be there as well, so I had to dress up.

I opened my closet and saw a white outfit. There weren't any accessories for me, and it wasn't a fancy outfit, so I definitely wouldn't attract any attention with this. It was kind of bulky, but it'd make it easier for me to move around. I needed to run around, after all.

'Is this the right thing to do?'

That question popped into my head, but I couldn't just stand by and do nothing.

I needed to do something to change the future.

I opened the window again and heard loud voices outside.

[Would you like to accept the invitation?]

I nodded and—

"Hello, Father."

"…"

"I'm Templar Genny, your guide," said a child.

I looked down at him and deduced that he had to be around fifteen years of age.

"I'll be your guide," Genny added.

I was kind of shocked, but I smiled because he looked exactly like the worst criminal in history—Templar Gen. I would believe it if someone told me that this was what he looked like in his past life.

"Thank you for accepting Saint Altanus' invitation," Genny said.

CHAPTER 964
ALTANUS (1)

'Altanus?'

"…"

"Many people, including people from aboveground are coming, so we prepared many things. Can I take you to the room you'll be staying in first?" Genny asked.

"I must be pretty early," I commented.

"That's not true. There are people who arrived a week ago… Of course, it simply means that they're excited to attend this social gathering. We're sincerely grateful. *Ah!* This is your room. Did you bring any luggage with you? If you did, I'll carry—"

"I didn't," I replied.

"Please let me know if you need anything. By the way, have you eaten?" Genny asked.

'He sure talks a lot. It's like I can hear him from all directions.'

"Maybe there are places you'd like to visit? By the way, please refrain from wandering around the Underground Temple by yourself. This place is really big, so people visiting for the very first time often get lost. There are even places unknown to me, so if there's any place you would like to visit, ring the bell next to the door.

"Father… would you like me to guide you to the cafeteria?" Genny asked.

'Now isn't the time for me to have a chit-chat with you.'

"It's a public cafeteria used by many followers. It's as impressive as the one aboveground, but they offer a huge variety of delicious food, so I recommend you try it out. The popular dish is…" Genny trailed off.

'Just go away.'

I already had many things on my mind, and I did not need his yapping.

'Altanus? Altanus? Did you just call her Saint Altanus?'

"How about visiting that place? It has wonderful statues, Father. Can I ask if there are statues like those aboveground?" Genny asked.

Normally, I'd talk to him as well, but I was suspicious of whether Templar Gen had become a vessel of one of the old spirits. No, he definitely became a vessel. The figure before me looked exactly like the younger version of Gen.

There were too many things that I couldn't just overlook.

Genny would probably become one of the four remaining Templars in the future.

It seemed that I was experiencing the events prior to the Templar Training Experimental Report and before the downfall of the Templars and the Mole Saint.

The social gathering probably took place when Gen was still a kid.

Genny could be one of the test subjects as well, but based on the situation down here, my first assumption was highly likely to be true. The temple was in good shape, and the sight convinced me that there were many Templars here.

Of course, I needed to gain Genny's favor. He'd become a named being in the future, after all, and he had a bright and successful future ahead of him.

I had yet to decide what I was going to do, but I had come here empty-handed, so I needed someone I could rely on. The moment I saw him, I told myself that I would do that, but…

'I really thought Benigoa was the Mole Saint.'

However, Genny's remark not too long ago had erased that thought in my head.

'Altanus? The one locked up underground is Saint Altanus?'

I lacked information. I was sure many things had changed since all this happened.

The doctrines, the books, and ways of worshiping had changed drastically as well.

The most prominent subject of worship right now was not Altanus, which meant that some unknown god was in control. What was Benigoa doing? I couldn't understand what was going on. I needed time to gather my thoughts and get more information.

"Where are you from, Father?" Genny asked.

The kid was still busy trying to satisfy his curiosity.

Was he happy because it had been a while since someone from the outside world had visited this place?

At his age, it was only natural for him to be curious about many things. Unfortunately, it didn't seem like he was going to stop yapping anytime soon. I wanted to talk to him, but I had to be careful about my words.

'First of all, I need more information.'

"Could you…" I paused.

"Yes!"

"Could you guide me to the library? I'd like to go to the prayer room afterward…" I requested.

It wasn't a bad choice.

"I-I see… I was being rude, Father," Genny said.

"No, it's fine, Templar Genny," I said.

He looked kind of embarrassed, which was expected, as there were answers he wanted to hear from me.

'This is what it means to be an adult.'

He was still in his early to mid teens, so he was full of energy and curiosity.

He had to have been living his entire life here and had been doing nothing but training.

Regardless, his training couldn’t suppress his true self at all.

I was sure he found it interesting to see a visitor from aboveground.

Since he had been living his whole life here, he was definitely curious about the world up above. As a result, he unknowingly got too excited, and he ended up talking nonstop.

However, the clean and upright priest from aboveground was only interested in studying, theology, and worshiping.

I was quiet, behaved, and was careful about my actions. I was a model priest. I was a holy man who had decided to live only for God, and the revelation silenced the noisy parrot.

“You don’t need to apologize, and I’m actually grateful that you’re taking great care of an insignificant person like me. I hope you’ll keep taking care of me, Templar Genny,” I said.

“O-Okay!” Genny shouted.

‘Playing around with a little kid isn’t that hard.’

“I-I’ll take you to the library, Father,” Genny stuttered.

He looked a bit different from earlier. Someone of his age would have one or two idols.

I was not sure what kind of person his idols were, but I knew just what type of people he couldn't help but admire.

'And it's probably priests… ’

Genny was quiet, cautious about his every step. I noticed him glancing multiple times at me while I was walking beside him.

Perhaps the way I was walking cautiously without making a single sound looked cool to him. He could only hear the sound of my clothes, but even that noise sounded holy to him.

He was worried about being a nuisance. He was scared about getting in my way, so I thought helping him relax a little would be great.

“Templar Genny,” I said.

“Yes, Father!” Genny shouted.

‘Geez, that was loud.’

“I-I’m sorry. I didn’t realize—”

“It’s fine, Templar Genny,” I interrupted him.

It was another mistake that lowered his self-esteem.

“E-Excuse me… Father,” Genny said cautiously.

“Yes?”

“I-If you’re not satisfied about the Templar in charge…” Genny paused.

“Why do you think that?” I asked.

“I feel like… I’ve caused too much trouble… I’m afraid of getting in your way…” Genny answered.

I smiled lightly and stared deeply at him.

“…”

“…”

Eventually, I said, “You don’t have to think that way. I actually don’t know what kind of person you are… but I feel like I’ve been getting nothing but positive energy from you."

“…”

“You don’t need to criticize yourself, nor do you need to be so humble. Revealing your true self to me is more than enough for me to be grateful to you, Templar

Genny," I added.

"*Ah…* I-I see," Genny said.

"It seems that you are really interested in what life is like aboveground," I said.

"I-I'm embarrassed to say it, but I do," he answered.

"You don't have to feel embarrassed. I'm also interested in the world down here," I told him.

"*Ah!*"

"The people selfless enough to sacrifice themselves and lock themselves up in this lightless place are the reason the surface world has become a prosperous place where the denizens are always laughing.

"I believe those martyrs are the closest to the light, and the people who have been living in this place are worthy of standing next to her," I said.

"…"

"I'd like to thank you on behalf of the people aboveground," I said.

"I-I…"

"…"

"I would also like to thank the people aboveground, Father. The believers down here said that the Underground Temple only exists due to the priests aboveground," Genny remarked.

'I'm sure that's true. Who else will pay for your living expenses?'

"So it looks like we're helping each other out," I commented.

"Yes…"

I smiled as if I was telling him that we could have a mutual relationship, just like how the Underground Temple and the priests aboveground were helping each other out.

I'd be able to obtain information about this place from him, and he'd obtain information about the surface world from me.

'Of course, ninety percent of the information that I'm going to tell him are lies, but what does this kid even know? My lies are probably even better than the truth. I'm also good at telling exciting stories.'

Genny hadn't said anything, but he looked like he understood what I was trying to say, and I would be fine if he interpreted my words as me saying, "Let's get along."

If we ended up getting close, we'd share many things with each other, and he'd ask many questions first.

We talked about many different topics until we arrived at a place that looked like a library. He stared deeply at me while talking, and it was probably because he wanted to see my reaction.

"This is the underground library, Father," Genny said.

"It's a nice place," I said.

I expected this place to be big, but it was bigger than I thought.

The place was like five meters tall, and it was filled with a huge variety of books. The Underground Temple was flourishing indeed. That was what I thought. The moment I stepped foot into the library, however, the sheer size of the place made my jaw drop.

"There are books that were written here, but—"

"They're probably books about the surface world," I interrupted.

"I'm glad you're happy," Genny said.

'How can I not be happy?'

I had to read them as soon as possible.

I didn't have a super good memory like Hwang Jung-Yeon, but I was confident that I would be able to memorize the key details in these books.

“Templar Genny,” I said.

“Yes?”

“I’d like to spend the night here,” I told him.

“What?”

I wanted to bury myself in these books.

I’d check the books related to religion first.

I was sure most of them were related to religion, but I had to read as much as I could. It wouldn't take me long to categorize these books. My plan was to put them into two categories—those I had to read thoroughly and those I could just skim.

It was imperative that they see me as someone well informed.

There would be many conversations during the social gathering, and I had to meet many people as well. If there were things unknown to me, I'd stray away from the point or leave. If I knew something but wasn't exactly sure what I was talking about, I'd just exaggerate my answer.

I’d deduce the topics that we’d most likely talk about deeply and obtain as much knowledge as possible for those topics.

I was so focused that I failed to notice my surroundings.

‘Where did he go?’

Templar Genny was missing, but I saw coffee and snacks when I turned.

I took a sip of the coffee and returned to my reading.

Fortunately, I managed to obtain the information that I wanted to acquire.

‘Where did Benigoa go?’

Benigoa wasn’t mentioned in any books.

'Shouldn't she be in at least this particular book?'

Even if Altanus was the Mole Saint, it was strange how Benigoa wasn't mentioned at all.

And that was when I saw a familiar face…

It was the face of a woman, and she was staring at me.

"*Ah*, I'm sorry," said the woman, sounding like an awkward idiot.

'Benigoa?'

A brown-haired maid was staring at me.

CHAPTER 965
ALTANUS (2)

“I thought there was no one here… I-I’m sorry,” the brown-haired maid said.

“Benigoa?” I asked.

“Excuse me?”

I blurted out my thoughts without realizing it, and I said it in a loud voice.

I said her name clearly, but the woman in front of me looked at me with confusion.

It was a reaction that told me that her name was not Benigoa at all. The tower of books that I had worked hard to organize had fallen down, and she looked like she had no idea what to do. She had the same demeanor as the Benigoa I was familiar with.

The only difference was her hair color and clothes.

Instead of her usual white and gold embroidered outfit, she was wearing a tattered maid outfit. Her shiny and smooth hair had taken on a dull brown color. There were dark spots on her face, and she looked shabby overall.

She had light freckles around her nose, and she looked thinner than usual.

I never really thought that Benigoa had ever acted like a transcendent being ought to act, but she had a beauty that suited her status as a transcendent being, and her believers even believed that she was the perfect existence.

Except for her aggrieved look, the woman before him was pretty similar to Benigoa. It was just similar, but I felt like this woman *was* actually Benigoa.

“I’m sorry. I’m really sorry,” she apologized. She tried to clean up the books that had fallen because she had bumped into them, but when she turned around, her books decimated what remained of the tower of books.

"*Ah!*" she exclaimed, startled.

Then, she fell backward on her butt. "*Kyah!*"

She couldn't do anything at all.

"…"

"I'm sorry! I'm sorry, Father!" she exclaimed.

She looked exactly like Benigoa.

"What should I do? Father… I'll clean this up. I'm sorry," she offered.

'No, don't. I don't have to wait around to see what's going to happen… Damn it.'

"I'll…"

'Please don't do anything.'

"Where was this book at?" she muttered.

"…"

"*Cough! Cough!* I'm sorr… *Cough!* There's suddenly dust—*Cough!*" she said.

'I think I'm going to start coughing, too.'

"Father… I-I'm going to drink some… *Cough! Cough!'* she said.

'Don't drink my coffee, damn it.'

"*Whew…* T-Thank you. I'm feeling better," she said.

A troublemaker appeared after the noisy parrot. She was so dumb that I felt like I was becoming stupid as well, and it made me feel uneasy. However, I couldn't avoid her, so I needed to confirm my assumptions first.

"It's fine," I said.

“No! I-I did this, so I’ll clean it up. You can sit and keep reading…” she argued.

“I’ll clean it up, so you can just leave it. I was actually thinking about taking a break,” I told her.

“B-But…”

“If you feel bad, how about you keep me company?” I suggested.

“What?”

“You just need to talk to me for a bit,” I told her.

“…”

“…”

“Can you tell me your name?” I asked.

“…”

“My name is Lee Ki-Young,” I introduced myself.

First, I needed to lower her guard as much as possible. I could still remember how Benigoa was a really big coward at the time.

As usual, I decided to smile and provide her with a comfortable atmosphere.

She seemed hesitant, and I thought perhaps it was because she felt awkward about the idea of spending time with someone she had just met.

I got nervous, feeling like I had made a mistake, but her serious face relaxed slightly—no, she was actually smiling brightly right now. Wait, it was more like she was desperately trying to suppress her facial smile, making her look kind of weird.

“T-That’s… Are you…” she stammered, “Asking me out on a date? A-Are you flirting with me?”

‘What the hell?’

“P-People from aboveground are pretty aggressive…” she remarked.

‘What the hell are you talking about?’

“I’m not ready yet… I’m sorry. *Ah!* I’m not apologizing because I don’t want to spend time with you. It’s just that… it's my first time experiencing something like this… a-and I’m not very familiar with it, so I don’t know what to do…” she explained.

‘This girl.’

“Your face is far from being my type… b-but don’t misunderstand, Father. I’m not saying you’re ugly… It’s just you’re not my type… but you do look pretty, though."

"B-But… that’s not… my ideal type… How should I say it… I kind of liked your intelligent look while you were absorbed in your reading…” she added.

“…”

“I guess I like your aura… and you look sexy, too… Something like that,” she said.

‘What is wrong with her?’

She looked like she was already daydreaming.

“I-It feels immoral because you’re a priest… O-Of course, I’m not saying that priests shouldn’t date anyone… but priests give off a 'pure' feeling, right?” she asked.

‘Stop talking to yourself.’

“I-If things go well, does that mean I’ll get to live aboveground, too? Or here? I think we’ll have to live here. You seem kind of weak… Are you okay? I don’t want to be a widow at such a young age… If you have some sort of chronic illness…” she asked.

I found it absurd how she was talking to herself. To make things worse, she seemed unaware that she was doing that.

I wanted to pinch her cheeks because of her rude comments. However, this was a brand-new sight to me; I had no idea that Benigoa was *that* interested in dating.

Perhaps it wasn't strange, as when she was up there, she was a goddess, but right

now, she was just a human being. I was sure she had her own fantasies, and I was sure this kind of romance was something she desired like the other girls out there.

The issue was that she was going a bit too far here.

'Widow, my ass… '

"I-I accept your offer, Father," she said.

The shy look that she revealed upon realizing that she wanted made her look cuter. After all, she revealed that look after organizing her thoughts right in front of me.

I heard everything, including the remark about how priests who had been invited to this social gathering were all competent, about how I didn't look *that* weak, and it wouldn't be so bad to test it out and enjoy it.

Despite saying all of those, she was blushing as if she were an innocent girl.

Her voice sounded higher than usual, and she started to sound a bit adorable.

'You're not my type either.'

Even if we were facing the apocalypse, Benigoa and I would never be in that kind of relationship.

'I don't like you, either… '

I wanted to deny it and embarrass her, but it wouldn't be effective. I felt kind of uncomfortable by the misunderstanding, but it was enough to get close to her.

In the end, I decided to smile and confidently.

'Are you serious?'

She was staring at me while tilting herself at the perfect angle to look as alluring as possible, but I didn't feel anything at all.

"I'm a maid working here underground, and I'm in charge of quite a few tasks that ensure the comfort of the believers. My hobby is going on a stroll. I was born and raised here. You were invited to the social gathering, right?

"*Ah!* And my specialty… my specialty…"

'Do you even have any? And who talks about their hobbies and specialties during a blind date?'

"I'm Lee Ki-Young. As you said, I'm from aboveground, and I'm here to attend the social gathering. I'm from the Land of Nejesca—"

"Yes, I've heard of that place! Land of Nejesca!" she interrupted.

It was the perfect background for me.

I was a priest from a remote land. I was from a region that was struggling to recover after the war. Due to the devastating war, there were many wandering priests doing volunteer work.

Wouldn't it make sense to be a priest from a remote place?

"So you're a wandering priest," the maid said.

"That's right. I'm not sure why I was invited, but…" I paused.

"You were invited because you did great. You're a role model and the work that you do is an example for many people. You should be happy. I'm giving you additional points," she replied.

'I don't need your additional points, so take it back. Also, don't wink at me.'

"*Haha*… I'm glad," I said.

"Seeing how you like books, reading must be your hobby. It's my first time seeing a priest so absorbed in reading that the books have piled up like this. Come to think of it—"

"Hold on…" I interrupted her because our topic was not really important.

"Yes, Father?"

"Could you tell me your name?" I requested.

"*Ah!* You must not be aware," she said.

"What?"

"We don't have a name," she informed me.

'What the hell is she talking about?'

"We're called Atenta… meaning—workers born to serve God. It's a noble mission because we're the only ones allowed to carry it out," she explained.

I activated Mind's Eyes and checked her stats.

"…"

'It's true.'

She truly had no name. It was so ridiculous that I was at a loss for words. I knew human rights basically did not exist on the continent around this time, but I had no idea that things were *this* bad.

Even slaves had names, which made this brown-haired maid even worse than a slave.

'Born to serve God? What exactly do you do?'

Of course, their mission was not important to me. The continent's human rights status and whatnot were none of my business. There was only one thing I had to focus on and think about.

'This isn't an ordinary invitation.'

Perhaps I wasn't invited to clear a dungeon, and there were many things that were too suspicious to say that it was a mere coincidence, such as the silence of both Benigoa and the higher-ups.

Of course, there was a high chance that this was a part of the dungeon raid… but I felt like the reason behind this invitation wasn't just to give out information about a named boss, so I had to say something here.

“Benigoa.”

“*Huh?* What’s a 'Benigoa'? Come to think of it, you said that earlier as well…” the maid said.

“Can I call you Benigoa?” I asked.

I was here to put the remaining puzzle pieces together.

CHAPTER 966
ALTANUS (3)

If this invitation wasn't just a simple invitation, and if I assumed that this wasn't a simple gathering, then I had an idea about why I traveled back in time. After all, there was a reason behind every happening.

Just like how the masked hero made plans for me, I also had to make a plan for the masked hero in the future. I had to act in a certain way to achieve the results that I wanted to achieve.

I still lacked information, but an outline of what I needed to do was becoming clearer in my head. In the past, Benigoa was nothing more than a maid part of the so-called Atenta.

To make things worse, she was just an ordinary, nameless maid. The first thing I needed to do was give her a name and then support her so that she could take her place as Benigoa. Afterward…

'Would gnawing away at Saint Altanus' power be the right move?'

Everything started with the downfall of Altanus.

It all started when her power and holy power went down.

I assumed that event was the blueprint needed to solve the puzzle.

The number of Templars went down drastically during her downfall, and they started thirsting for Altanus' blood. The Templars proceed with the ritual of succession, and Altanus ends up locking herself up in the iron maiden, which made the continent walk down the path of destruction.

Lucifer was managing the continent right now, but she failed spectacularly.

The culture and religion that she had made were hidden in the shadows.

The Order of Altanus was created later, and its creation brought upon new culture, a new continent, and a new order.

However, I still had no idea why the Order of Altanus managed to settle on the ground later on when they had been stuck underground all this while.

‘I think it's my job to uncover that, too.’

I couldn't say that I had a lot of time, but I definitely had enough time to establish and polish them.

‘This must happen no matter what.’

Altanus had to be born, and Altanus' opinion herself did not matter at all. Upon entering the iron maiden, her soul had to leave her body and rise to become a goddess ruling over the continent.

'She’ll make Kim Hyun-Sung a regressor, after all.’

Altanus, who had fallen in love with the hero while observing his story from up above, would then be erased.

Altanus’ will would then be handed over to Benigoa, and the second life would begin just like that.

I felt like the timeline that had brought me to this point was being drawn in my head, but there were still many details that needed to be tweaked.

I wasn’t sure whether that accessory from Mirror Lake was something that was agreed upon between the Masked Hero and her. It could also be simply Altanus acting on her own, but there was a chance that it was a part of my plan.

It was possible that everything would happen in order without me having to do anything about it. The saint’s downfall, Lucifer’s downfall, and the birth of the Order of Altanus could all be events guaranteed by the system.

However, I wasn’t completely certain.

I didn’t even know what exactly the system wanted, so it was better to do something for now rather than just sit around.

‘This is better.’

I felt more comfortable moving around than doing nothing, which was why I called her "Benigoa."

“I-I don’t want it,” the maid said.

“…”

However, it seemed that it wouldn't be that easy.

“You’re more rude than I thought,” she said.

‘What is she saying all of a sudden?’

“Is it because I look similar to the person you cherished in the past?” she asked.

‘What the hell is she talking about?’

“That’s why you called me 'Benigoa' as soon as you saw me, right? I don’t know what’s your relationship with her… but we must really look alike… I understand how you feel… but I can’t replace her—”

'Looks like she just wrote a strange story in her head.'

“It’s nothing like that,” I interrupted her.

“Then…”

“Benigoa… means a sky shining brightly,” I told her.

“…”

“…”

“A sky shining brightly…” she repeated.

I said it without thinking, but it was effective.

“A sky shining brightly…” she muttered, looking flustered because I had just told her

that she was beautiful. I *did* call her Benigoa upon seeing her. Anyone would have the same reaction as her upon being called "a sky shining brightly."

She was definitely feeling kind of embarrassed. I couldn't read Benigoa's thoughts, but my words had affected her positively, and it was proven by how she nodded slightly.

“I-Is there… a reason why you want to call me Benigoa…” she asked.

“It's because I want to meet you again…” I replied.

“I… see. I’m not the only Atenta in the Underground Temple… I-I understand what you mean. Despite your looks… I mean, I knew you were aggressive from the get-go, but you’re more aggressive than I thought.

"I don’t think I can reciprocate your feelings *yet…* b-but please know that I’m thinking positively about it,” she explained.

“Then, Miss Benigoa-”

“I…! I’m pretty busy… and I’m behind on my work, so I need to go take care of them. W-Will you be in the library tomorrow as well?” she asked.

"I’ll probably stay here if I have no tasks to handle, Miss Benigoa,” I answered.

“P-Please stop calling me Benigoa! I-It’s embarrassing and really shocking. I-I’m grateful that you think I’m that charming, but a sky shining brightly? People from the surface world really are aggressive,” she said.

“Will you help me tomorrow as well?” I asked.

“I’ll… think about it, but don’t expect too much. I-I have high standards when it comes to men,” she answered.

“…”

“G-Goodbye.”

With that, she ran excitedly toward the exit, but she ran too fast and ended up falling to the ground. Her silly and clumsy attitude made me laugh. Of course, I couldn’t just

stare at her back because I needed to confirm my assumptions.

If my presence here would affect the future…

'I should do a simple experiment.'

I left a letter for the expedition team members.

It had been quite a while since then, so there was a chance that the first strike squad had already entered this library on the eighth floor.

Kasugano Yuno had to have already delivered the letter to Commander Jin.

We were in different times, but he and I had to be in the same place right now.

I took out an alchemy kit from my bag and removed a portion of the floor.

[Creating an Epic-rank Hidden Quest.]

[A Warning From the Past - Epic Rank]

[Someone from the past sends you, the one who discovered this place, a warning. If you discovered this place, you must be someone who came down here to protect the continent. You must've come here to fight against the evil that threatens the continent. I understand it's not an easy task, and it's full of hardships. A gift was left for you in this secret place. It's a legacy passed down from the past for the heroes who will arrive here in the future. I pray that your future will be bright.]

[Someone from the distant past has given you a warning. Since you've stumbled upon this place, you must have come down here to protect the continent. You must be here to fight against the evil that threatens the continent.

[I understand that it is not an easy task, and you will experience many hardships later down the road, so I left behind a gift for you to take. It's a legacy for the heroes who will be here in the future.

[I pray that your future is replete with light.]

[Quest Reward - A Potion From the Distant Past]

'This should be enough, right?'

I shoved a few useful potions into the floor. It was an Epic-rank quest, so it would be best to include a few items that could be used right away.

I covered the ground and made sure to clean things up. I didn't want to leave any traces, so I decided to use a reagent upon burying the quest that I had created into the ground along with the potions.

It was a simple and common trick often used in dungeons for the sake of easter eggs, hidden quests, and hidden pieces.

The reward wasn't that great, even though it was well hidden, but I thought that it wasn't so bad.

After all, this quest was available to everyone.

It was possible that someone would find it before them, but I didn't believe that a lunatic would suddenly start digging up the ground. I was more worried that someone might find it accidentally upon tripping over a book and noticing the incongruity on the floor.

With that in mind, it wasn't bad to include those potions as the reward. The finder would be really happy about finding it, as it was like finding a hidden treasure. Those potions were rare, so I believed that they wouldn't analyze the potion's ingredients.

'Actually, they might.'

I wasn't convinced that they'd be able to uncover all the ingredients, but what if an alchemist stumbled upon the stash and decided to analyze the potions? What if they ended up succeeding, and alchemy became extremely popular throughout the continent?

What if the librarian, whom I assumed was the boss of this area, ended up throwing away the potion upon discovering it accidentally?

They were meaningless thoughts, but I was pretty sensitive to the butterfly effect.

The smallest action could change the future. The changes wouldn't be that massive, but there was a risk that many things would change.

At this point, I couldn't help but wonder whether I got a bit too impulsive.

I looked around and started tapping on my thigh, but this was the time to take risks.

'I'll be a fool if I don't do anything just because I'm afraid of the butterfly effect.'

"Commander Jin, please…" I mumbled. I had been pacing around for hours. I had been reading books to prepare for the social gathering and obtain more information about this continent, but I couldn't focus at all.

"Father, about dinner—"

"I'm fine, Templar Genny," I interrupted him.

Templar Genny decided to check up on me.

"I'm worried about your health, Father," Genny said.

"They say that books are food for the mind, Templar Genny. This is also part of my practice, so you don't have to worry too much," I reassured him.

"But still…"

"…"

"Father," Genny said.

"If you're that worried, I'll eat a small piece of bread…" I told him.

"Okay! I'll bring it for you," he said.

I even had to take unnecessary meal breaks.

"By the way…" I trailed off.

"Yes?" Genny answered.

"Do you know of an Atenta with brown hair and freckles?" I asked.

"I'm sorry, Father. I've never talked to an Atenta," Genny replied.

We had a decent conversation…

'Are they still dealing with the librarian?'

Perhaps they had yet to reach this library.

I thought I could relax, but there was a limit to how much time I could spend here. I thought it would be best if I left tricks in the other parts of the library, but that would increase the chances of the items getting discovered prematurely…

[Epic-rank Quest, A Warning From the Past, has been completed.]

I couldn't tell whether it was Jin Cheong or not, but I couldn't stop smiling.

* * *

[You have discovered the Epic-ranked Hidden Quest—A Warning From the Past.]

"What the hell is that idiot up to now?"

[The quest is completed automatically.]

CHAPTER 967
ALTANUS (4)

By the time you receive this letter, I'm not there anymore, Commander. I'm sincerely sorry for leaving when the situation has been so gloomy.

Anyway, what kind of person am I to you?

A trustworthy comrade?

Your one and only rival in the world?

Perhaps an archenemy you find so vile you'd never feel satisfied even if you were to beat me to death.

You may get upset about some of the things I did, but it was all because so many things had happened. I did all of them to help you grow, Commander. It's to prepare you for this kind of situation.

I left this letter because I obviously have a small favor to ask of you. As the Saint of Light and the heart of the continent, I must fight against a cruel fate, so someone needs to take care of the expedition group in my place.

It is going to be burdensome, and I also know better than anyone that your skills… are lacking, but don't let that burden bring you down.

With Miss Hye-Jin, I'm sure you'll be able to overcome these trying times.

What if you're still struggling? Don't worry. I wrote everything down in the manual.

Of course, I'm not doubting your skills because I'm sure you'll be able to overcome these trying times just fine, but you never know what's going to happen.

Who could have known that I'd immediately get thrown into the past?

That's why you have to move with haste. I have many things to do. You know best what

I can do and the results I can achieve. I have been thinking about many things, as my actions in the past may have a butterfly effect upon my return. I think this is just a simple event, but it's highly likely that it's bigger than just a "simple" event. I might do a small experiment, so please be a little more diligent and thorough.

I'm sure you don't like this because it feels like I'm ordering you around, but you must cooperate with me so you can achieve the same amount of results as me.

I also have other people who can help me if you don't want to help me, so you can decline if you dare. Lastly, there are many things written in the enclosed letter, and it also contains the manual I mentioned earlier and some of the information about this dungeon that I discovered earlier.

Don't let your pride burn the letter because I already sent this information to the other commanders. I'll stop here.

Good luck, Hero of Shadows!

'Bastard.'

I[1] wanted to tear this letter apart because it wasn't something I could just laugh off.

The expedition group became depressed upon his disappearance.

Basically, the expedition group couldn't operate properly anymore.

Just a few hours ago—no, some of the expedition parties were still incapacitated. The main force that was supposed to maintain the balance of the expedition group had announced a temporary hold on the expedition.

I was sitting in his place like a statue, and there were many mages there.

It was shocking that an item had brought him back into the past, but what was even more ridiculous was how the expedition group was handling it.

'Did they only get the idiots?'

There was an order to find a way to go back to the past. The continent's most renowned researchers and mages were wasting their time on research that would never bear fruit.

Anyone could see that it was meaningless research.

If that crazy woman following him around couldn’t do it, then it was impossible.

In other words, the top-level expedition members were forced to do meaningless tasks.

At this rate, there was no way we could clear the dungeon.

To make matters worse, the dungeon difficulty was increasing gradually. Our supplies were also getting delayed, and we had yet to receive any decent news.

The command center was urging the first and the remaining strike squads to withdraw; they even made ridiculous comments about cutting off supplies if we refused to return.

That was probably why he thought that this was a good opportunity to do this.

[You have discovered an Epic-rank Hidden Quest, A Warning From the Past.]

“What the hell is that idiot up to?” I mumbled.

[The quest has been completed automatically.]

I had to focus here as well.

‘Looks like he’s not bluffing.’

I was sure the potion that I got as a quest reward had come from him. The potion was already being distributed in the Republic, and I couldn't help but notice it, as it reigned supreme over the market.

The potion was old, but there was nothing wrong with the quality. It probably managed to maintain its original form thanks to the quest's protection rather than the quality of the item.

I got a solid piece of evidence right when I was worried that he was talking nonsense.

Lee Ki-Young was in the past and was waiting for the quest to be completed. I

reckoned that he was standing in the same place as I was right now.

“Commander.”

“…” “Commander.”

“Yes, I’m listening,” I answered.

“The Command Center has ordered us to withdraw. They’re going to stop the expedition for now. The other strike squad members, including Mr. Rafael, are confused. At this rate—”

“Are there any items worth reporting from the items that the librarian had dropped? Maybe something related to the dungeon…” I interrupted.

“Nothing like that. Librarian Dolores dropped three spell books that mages can use and priest-exclusive accessories.”

“…”

“Is there anything you’d like to tell the Command Center?’

“Tell them that I’m looking for traces of Lee Ki-Young… I mean, the Sub Guild Master of the Blue Guild,” I answered.

“Excuse me?”

“Tell them that for now. I’ll take care of the rest. Once you're done, distribute the items based on the highest contribution level and prioritize the guilds that haven’t received any items yet,” I instructed.

“Yes, sir.”

I was still in control of the overall situation, but it could change anytime because that was his way of doing things. His unexpected methods would always catch me off guard.

Of course, the majority of his methods were mere bluffs, but I would never underestimate that jerk.

I was sure there were many things he could do under the assumption that this dungeon had existed a long time ago. He could send information about the dungeon, the boss monster, and the map of the dungeon through the method he had used just now.

He could even do something unknown to me.

Whatever he was going to do, it would be helpful in taking down the key figures of this dungeon and increasing his contribution level.

'Not bad.'

I didn't like it, but it was a reasonable decision to use him, as I was the commander of this raid. Of course, there were many things I needed to think about besides this game.

'Was there a reason he needed to go?'

The issue was simple.

He immediately used the invitation he had gotten from Spirit Gelk and took on the risk.

He was a selfish bastard, which was why I couldn't help but question his choice. I couldn't exclude the possibility of him hearing about the future from the blind shaman capable of seeing the future.

He was a total piece of trash, but he was overly obsessed with the people within his circle.

'A dummy and an ignorant fool. Maybe that crazy woman will end up dying in the end.'

He probably died as well.

However, the fact that they died meant that the expedition group was annihilated.

That was when I received a message…

[Starting a Linked Quest.]

[Reply From the Present - Epic]

[You have received a warning from the past. The threat right before your eyes may seem like a nightmare, but I believe you and your comrades will be able to overcome it. If you have proof that you've handled the threat, place it down in the same spot. I pray that you overcome this hardship.]

“Is it to get confirmation?” I questioned.

I was sure he wasn’t aware that I had discovered the quest.

I had no idea how many hundreds or even thousands of years were the gap between the past and the present, but there was no guarantee that this quest had remained hidden until now.

If someone else had discovered this quest, he'd probably think that the future had changed, as he had mentioned that he was worried about the butterfly effect.

He believed the future had to continue this way. Otherwise, he wouldn't have spoken in such a serious tone and in such an ambiguous way using keywords like "handling threats," "hardships," and "nightmares."

I raised my hand quietly and heard a voice.

“Did you call for me, Commander?”

“Can you bring me the loot that we've obtained from Librarian Dolores?” I requested.

“Yes, sir.”

Librarian Dolores' loot was probably the proof that he was talking about.

“And Commander.”

“Go ahead,” I said.

“The Guild Master of the Blue Guild is apparently heading this way.”

‘That piece of trash.’

He was the bastard who didn't even bother accepting my request for supplies.

I was dumbfounded at the news that he was coming here. I had suffered many times because the Commander Center was so slow in taking care of things, so the fact that they acted quickly this time made me feel angry.

"*Whoo…*"

"Here are the items that you've requested, and I also brought a list of the miscellaneous items that Dolores had dropped in case you needed them. Regarding the distribution… there are people who are worried that they—"

"Can you tell them that we'll distribute the loot later?" I interrupted.

"Sure."

"Thank you," I said.

"…"

[You have submitted the quest item.]

[The Epic-rank Linked Quest, Reply From the Present, has been completed.]\

[Starting a Linked Quest.]

[To the Prayer Room - Epic-rank]

[Please head to the prayer room.]

I believed things would become easier from here on out. Since it was a Linked Quest, no one would be able to see the quest except for the person who started the first quest of the Linked Quest.

Since he was thorough, I was sure there were going to be a few more verification processes, but it was going to be fine.

I got up slowly and heard murmurs outside.

"It's this way, Master."

“Is it true that traces of Mr. Ki-Young were found?” Kim Hyun-Sung asked.

“I’m not sure… but I’m sure Commander Jin Cheong knows the details. I’ll guide you there,” Kasugano Yuno replied.

It didn’t take long for him to reach this place.

“I didn’t think you’d come here so quickly,” I commented.

“…”

“…”

“I heard you found traces of Mr. Ki-Young?” Kim Hyun-Sung asked.

“That blind shaman is right. He’s in the past right now. He might be standing exactly where we’re standing right now,” I said.

“What does that have to do with finding traces of him?” Kim Hyun-Sung asked.

“He sent a message from the past. There was a potion buried in the ground of the library. He was even thorough with it and used reagents to hide it. He left a quest and I simply replied to it while you were wasting your time there,” I answered.

I didn’t say he could take it, but he stretched out his hand toward the potion.

‘Rude bastard.’

“…”

“Did he say anything else?” Kim Hyun-Sung asked.

“The name of the quest is 'A Warning From the Past,' but I don’t really remember the details. After that, there was a Linked Quest. Apparently, I have to offer Librarian Dolores' loot and head to the prayer room. Maybe—”

“He’s trying to guide me,” Kim Hyun-Sung interrupted me.

“There's a high chance that he's pointing out the place where the expedition group needs to go. Spirit Gelk dropped an invitation to a social gathering, so the

environment there has to be better than here…" Kim Hyun-Sung muttered.

"He's not even listening to me.'

"Anyway, there's no reason for you to be worried," I reassured him.

He still wasn't listening and was just staring at the potion. The researchers of the expedition group took the potion and would probably check to see whether it really came from the past.

And that was when Kim Hyun-Sung said something ridiculous.

"I'll handle the expedition group myself from now on."

"Bullshit," I commented.

"…"

"I am in command. That jerk—I mean, it's the will of the overall commander along with that woman named Jo Hye-Jin. You have no right to do that. Do you really think that I can trust the fate of the expedition group again to someone who has been demoted?" I argued.

'He's just an idiot who only knows how to use brute force.'

Kim Hyun-Sung did not respond to me and simply stared at me quietly.

'Bastard.'

I felt like things were going to get complicated.

He wouldn't be able to cause direct harm, but he could use a variety of ways to divide the expedition group. Actually, most of the supplies that were supporting the expedition group were coming from the Blue Guild and the Vatican, so I was basically an outsider.

Even if he and the others were to stage a coup, I had no right to stop him. It would be absurd to penalize him for insubordination, as he was above the law.

In the end, I had to say something ridiculous as well.

“You have other things you need to take care of.”

“What are you talking about?” Kim Hyun-Sung asked.

“There may be more than one invitation to the social gathering,” I lied.

I was sure there was only one invitation.

---

1. Jin Cheong’s POV ☜

CHAPTER 968
ALTANUS (5)

‘There may be more than one invitation to the social gathering.’

I was sure that would keep Kim Hyun-Sung, as that was the only thing he could do right now. I[1] knew what was happening to the expedition group without seeing it with my own eyes. I had written down guidelines for each of the key figures, but they definitely wouldn't follow them to a T.

Fortunately, I wrote them while considering their behavior.

The others would move according to my wishes, but Kim Hyun-Sung and Jung Ha-Yan would probably do something absurd, like looking for a way to return to the past.

They’d probably set up camp in the area where I had disappeared and do things that would delay the expedition. They’d bring all the competent members to that camp, which would delay the expedition.

‘Commander Jin needs to hold things together.’

If possible, I wanted Jo Hye-Jin to be in charge, but Kim Hyun-Sung was kind of her weakness. The expedition had to continue regardless of what I had to deal with here.

If they really had cleared the library, then the prayer room was their next destination. I still couldn’t confirm whether Jin Cheong was the one who had accepted the quest, but since I managed to confirm that he had accepted the Linked Quest, there was a high chance that he had accepted the quest "A Warning From the Past." as well.

‘Actually, come to think of it, there might really be a few more invitations.’

Obviously, Kim Hyun-Sung would be useless even if he were to come here.

It’d be better if…

'If Ji-Hye noona comes here.'

Anyway, it felt like some of the priorities had been handled. I managed to confirm that this event wasn't just a simple event, and I succeeded in delivering my message to the expedition group.

The next tasks at hand were delivering information and handling the overdue tasks.

First of all, I thought it would be best to acquire information about the prayer room, as I was already here.

The prayer room on the eighth basement floor had hundreds of rooms rather than just a single room. There were also chapels where everyone prayed together, but there were places for people like me who needed personal space.

Some of them were even used as confessionals by the priests…

'All of them must have become monsters.'

Father Draktaris was probably the boss monster here. He was a priest who was in charge of the private prayer rooms and had amazing holy power.

"Father Draktaris is a strict and stubborn person… and he's one of the priests in the Underground Temple with a lot of holy power. He's famous for living for the sake of Lady Lucifer. I have never really seen him that much, though…" Templar Genny said.

"Really?" I asked.

"Yes… it's because Father Draktaris has his own guards… He's so strong that he can't be compared to a low-level Templar like me," Templar Genny said.

'This is going to be tricky.'

"It's a shame since I wanted to meet him," I told him.

"He's always in the prayer room somewhere, so if you visit the prayer room often, I'm sure you'll eventually run into him," Templar Genny informed me.

'Does that mean he appears randomly?'

This was a corridor-style building, so it wasn't easy to bring in a bunch of troops at once.

The archbishop had guards on a similar level as the low-level Templars. If I had a lot of space to work with, then things would be easier, but the space was limited, so things were going to be a bit tricky.

'It's too small for a group to move around in.'

I needed a certain number of people to clear this place. I pondered briefly and reached the conclusion that three parties made up of five people were needed to clear this.

The most reasonable decision was to create a small party centered around the Blue Guild. I was bothered by the memory I had seen through Kasugano Yuno, but this place was different from the future I had seen.

"The statues in each prayer room also contain Lady Lucifer's holy power. It seems to contain a blessing that comforts the priests who come here to pray. I sometimes come here to pray as well…" Templar Genny paused.

'There are even relics in each room… '

Those relics were blessings to the enemy, but it was a cursed holy relic to our allied troops. Every time a room was opened, there would be a skirmish. It was highly likely for them to get exhausted—both physically and mentally.

I assumed Draktaris and his guards would appear once the party members were exhausted, and that was when the boss fight would begin.

If I were to assume that the statues would inflict debuffs as a part of the special event… I had to exclude Ha-Yan from this, as the statues' exact abilities were unknown. Han Sora could be used as her suppressor, but situations like this were always worrying.

It would be ideal to create a party with Park Deok-Gu, who had a ton of HP and could take a beating, our Hye-Jin, who was capable of making objective decisions, Elena, who had a ton of holy power, and Sun Hee-Young.

We'd then take Rafael's party with us.

'I'll exclude Kim Hyun-Sung as well, just in case… '

Kim Ye-Ri, Lee Chang-Ryeol, and Park Lian were all excluded from this part of the expedition, too.

"Templar Genny, I'll get back to what I was doing…" I told him.

"Yes, Father. I'll wait for you outside," Templar Genny said.

"Thank you."

The prayer rooms were big since it was on a huge plot of land.

It was too narrow to fight in, but it was big enough to move around. There was a small altar and a statue on one side of the wall. I was sure the rooms were designed like this.

I was kind of worried, but I thought it'd be best if I included Alps as well since Shiro's buff was going to be helpful to the group.

[The Epic-rank Linked Quest has been completed.]

[Create an Epic-rank quest.]

[Archbishop of the Prayer Room - Legendary Rank]

[Father Draktaris is a devout priest residing in the prayer room. As a faithful servant of Lucifer, he possesses enough holy power to threaten you, and he is always accompanied by loyal and powerful guards.

[The statues of evil spirits in each prayer room will curse you and will constantly test adventurers with weak minds.

[Only certain heroes can overcome this crisis—an adventurer with a large shield, a priest with a massive amount of holy power, the Queen of the High Elves, a warrior with gray wings and his comrades, and a dog capable of blocking out negative thoughts.]

'Who else is there?'

A martial artist was needed, as the space to move was pretty small.

[Heroes capable of using their bodies as weapons are needed as well.]

Jin Cheong's soldiers, and lastly…

[The red beast.]

If the statues could truly attack people mentally, then bringing Hee-Ra noona was the right choice, as she had the strongest will out of all the people I knew.

[I wish good luck to the heroes who have willingly set foot on such a dangerous place for the continent's sake.]

This was basically an open-book test. Before creating the quest, I felt like I needed to leave a letter. I had to write a letter to Kim Hyun-Sung and Jung Ha-Yan.

In the letter, I needed to include that there were things I needed to do here that I could help them from here, and there weren't any issues with my identity here, as I had been invited to the social gathering.

I also needed to include that my time here was limited, and I'd return once the social gathering was over.

Lastly, I decided to write something nice like words of support and that should be enough. Since it was going to be a letter from the past, it'd be like a journal or an autobiography…

[Registering the Epic-rank Linked Quest, Archbishop of the Prayer Room.]

[??? has accepted the Linked Quest.]

There were things I needed to do before that quest was completed, so I gathered my hands quietly and unleashed light.

The room was instantly filled with light, and I was sure people outside could see the light seeping out. As always, the radiant light spread everywhere, and it even went into the other prayer rooms. I didn't spread my wings because I found it scary for some reason.

'I'm sure it's still effective.'

As expected, I heard murmurs outside.

The miracle made people gather one by one…

"O Lucifer…"

"O Saint Altanus…"

"What in the world…"

I wasn't sure why they mentioned Saint Altanus, but it was probably proof that she had a huge influence on this place. Even on the continent, they said things like, "O Saint of Light" or "Son of Light."

The light that filled the room was dimming slowly.

I stayed in the prayer for a while because I needed the crowd to become curious.

The crowd outside didn't leave my private prayer room alone, and their murmurs were getting louder.

I was sure the higher-ups were here as well.

If I stayed here for an entire day, they'd probably wait for me the entire day.

A priest would be able to express how touching it was to meet the Goddess after spending two or more days in this room, but I wasn't planning on spending two days here. We were in a state of emergency right now, after all.

Silence filled the room and the crowd didn't say anything.

What could they say to the crying priest covered in sweat?

No one was dumb enough to ask me whether I had met the Goddess or if I had heard Lady Lucifer's voice. I lowered my head quietly, praised the Goddess, and cried. Templar Genny cast a dumbfounded gaze at me. He had been by my side all this while, after all.

I walked quietly, but I fell to the side.

'I must've fallen naturally.'

Templar Genny grabbed me and supported me.

"Father, are you okay? Father," Templar Genny asked.

I forced myself to get up and nodded.

"Yes, I'm fine, Templar Genny. C-Could you get the archbishop for me?" I requested.

"W-What?"

Obviously, the archbishop was here. He came here with his guards.

As a loyal follower of Lucifer, he looked at me with a warm gaze.

"This man…"

"He's a priest who has been invited to the social gathering, Father Draktaris," Templar Genny replied.

"I see. Does he…" Draktaris muttered with a pale face, afraid that someone might hear him.

"I-It's not something we can discuss here, Father."

"…"

"I think it's best if we go somewhere else. Hellis, please escort him," Draktaris ordered.

"Yes, Father," Hellis replied.

"I-I…"

"You are?" he asked.

"I'm Templar Genny, Father Draktaris," Templar Genny answered.

“I think it’s best if you come with us,” he suggested.

I had just received a divine message, and I was in the middle of trying to recover my wits. However, I was being moved against my will. We walked down a small corridor and left the prayer room. Soon, we entered a reception room.

Draktaris seemed to be a man who favored minimalism, as the decorations in the reception hall were far from being fancy. I nodded because it made sense for him to practice minimalism. After all, he was a priest who lived only for Lucifer rather than a corrupted priest.

“Now…”

“…”

“Can you tell me what happened?” Draktaris asked.

I took a deep breath, but I was still crying.

Then, I looked pale and nervous as I answered, “Saint Altanus…”

“…”

“The divine message told me that she’ll slowly lose her holy power,” I said.

I wasn’t wrong here.

---

1. Lee Ki-Young’s POV ☜

CHAPTER 969
ALTANUS (6)

‘I guess I can say that the continent was already getting destroyed.’

Those unaware of what was happening outside were blabbering about the great, the protector, the benevolent, and the wise Lucifer. In my eyes, however, they looked like they were standing on the edge of a cliff.

Lucifer did not have the luxury to pass down a divine message or create miracles to promote herself. She couldn't even descend into a devotee's body.

I was sure that was the reason they locked up Saint Altanus underground. Lucifer needed someone to manage the scarred surface world—someone who could protect the continent.

The continent looked perfectly fine. According to the books in the library, the current level of civilization, mindset, and the overall living standards of the continentals were pretty high.

The underground temple was no different.

I thought there was an ongoing apocalypse outside, but the surface world had an abundant amount of resources, and there weren't any tainted regions as well.

Of course, social issues such as war, hunger, and poverty existed, but those were basically everywhere. The continent looked perfect in the eyes of a transcendent being.

Unfortunately, if something was perfect on the outside, then it had to be corrupted on the inside. In other words, it could be said that the continent's bubble was about to pop.

Lucifer was probably borrowing holy power from everywhere and was running around the continent to fix it.

‘Come to think of it, wasn't the Rift Museum created around this time as well?’

Max’s mother—my spiritual wife—probably died while trying to close the rift.

Several issues popped up, and if it weren't for the underground temple, the surface world would be a mess.

Lucifer had to have locked Altanus here, as she couldn’t bear to look at the continent herself. In that sense, it could be said that Draktaris wasn't really communicating with the priests of the continent.

‘Is this the first miracle in decades—no, centuries?’

I was sure that it had a really long wait.

‘They've been living for this day, after all.’

And that was the reason this clumsy event was so effective.

“Do you really understand… what she said?” Draktaris asked.

“I don’t want to believe it, either, Father Draktaris,” I said.

“…”

“But what I heard is the absolute truth. Lady Lucifer said that Saint Altanus would eventually lose her light. The foundation that has been protecting and maintaining the continent would become unstable. A great threat will soon be upon us,” I said while crying like a child. “She said that darkness will envelop the continent, and everyone will tremble in pain and fear. *Heuk…*”

“H-How could this…” Draktaris mumbled.

“That’s…”

“O Lucifer… how…” Draktaris said.

“Saint Altanus lost her light, and I saw what happened to the surface world after that. The denizens were crying tears of blood, and they were cursing Lady Lucifer,” I said.

“It… can’t be…” Draktaris muttered in disbelief.

“O Lucifer… are you going to abandon the continent… Are you going to abandon your lambs?” I cried out.

“F-Father…” Draktaris stuttered.

“*AAAAAAAHHHHH!*” I roared, acting like a lunatic.

“Calm him down! Hurry!” Draktaris ordered.

“The darkness! The darkness! Is coming! *Heuk… heuk… Ahhhh!*” I screamed.

“Father! Are you okay? Father!” he asked.

“Saint Altanus! O Lucifer! Why… *Heuk… Ahh… Ahhhh!*” I shouted.

I clutched my chest and started roaring like a lunatic.

The sight seemed to have finally made everyone realize the gravity of the situation.

Draktaris' tough guards grabbed me, but they couldn't do anything about my mind.

I was bawling, and I was crying so much that my eyes were hurting.

I was losing my mind.

I couldn’t stop crying.

I even had no idea what I was doing right now, as I was actually losing consciousness.

“*Heuk… Haa… Heuuuk… Ahhh!*” I shouted.

“Father! Father! Are you okay?” Draktaris asked.

I was having a seizure, and my heart was pounding fast against my chest.

I was breathing fast, but it felt like I wasn't getting enough air.

“Hurry! On Father Lee Ki-Young!” Draktaris ordered.

"*Heuk...* O Lucifer… Lucifer…" I mumbled.

When a stream of holy power entered me, I slowly calmed down. My breathing became calm, and I stopped crying. However, I was covered in sweat, utterly exhausted.

"…"

"…"

After the commotion, a deafening silence filled the room.

'My acting skills were amazing.'

It was perfect.

It seemed like no one cared about whether my words were true or not.

Everyone, including Father Draktaris, looked pale.

They got immersed in my performance which was so brilliant that even the winner of the "Best Actor Award" would cry upon seeing it.

Was the scene of the continent heading toward the apocalypse reflected in the panicking protagonist who had received a divine message?

Were they sympathizing with the priest whose heart almost ceased all movement out of terror and shock?

The reason didn't really matter.

Anyway, Templar Genny was busy explaining everything that he knew.

He was still too young to know about the truths of the world, so he looked nervous, and there were tears in his eyes. He looked paler than a sheet of paper. It was a typical reaction of someone like him. Actually, his reaction wasn't *that* bad because he had received training, but if he had been an ordinary kid, he would have fainted from terror.

"…"

"…"

Templar Genny came back to his senses and approached me.

"E-Excuse me, Father. Are you okay?" Templar Genny asked.

"Y-Yes… I… just…" I mumbled.

I looked like I still had no idea what had happened.

"He's in shock, Father Draktaris. I think it's best if he rests first…" Templar Genny suggested.

"I agree, but…" Draktaris paused.

"What should we do about this?" Draktaris continued.

"Let's not tell anyone for now," Templar Genny answered.

'Yeah, that's a reasonable decision. There's no point in making everyone panic. I'm sure that's not what he wants, though.'

However, it'd be absurd to notify the ordinary priests of this incident, and he'd also have to think twice about the higher-ups. A low-level priest would immediately run to the higher-ups and let them know about this, but Draktaris wasn't a low-level priest.

He had his own troops and a group of holy knights who were on the same level as low-level Templars.

He had to consider the impact that this incident would have once word got out, but he also had to worry about the corrupted priests, who'd definitely use this incident to their advantage. Of course, a few people would inevitably find out, but it was going to be fine as long as they worked hard at suppressing the news.

In this room, there wasn't anyone else aside from me, Draktaris, two of his trustworthy guards, and Templar Genny. After saying a few words to one of his personal guards, he walked up to me.

He grabbed my hand—the hand of the one aware of the continent's grim future. I

knew what he was going to say, so I decided to speak first.

“Father," I said, “This is presumptuous of me, but…” I paused.

“…”

“How about… we keep this a secret for the time being?” I suggested.

'Yeah, that's right.'

“Father…” he mumbled.

I wasn’t just a devout priest.

‘I’m an elite priest.’

I was aware of what kind of impact this incident would bring, as I was a priest capable of looking at the bigger picture before making any decisions.

I was a well-educated priest who understood politics and current affairs.

Basically, I was competent. I was someone people would want to work for them.

I was panicking and was like a lunatic just a few moments ago, but I could simply say that it was all because my faith was strong.

My sponsor—no, Father Draktaris, who'd become my sponsor, looked at me with deep and wise eyes.

‘Yeah, take a good look at my behavior, too.’

Even at a glance, anyone could see that I was a noble.

‘I was acting cautious.’

My hands were soft as if I had never experienced any hard labor, and my skin was pale, as I was barely in the sun. I was sure many thoughts were popping up in his head right now.

He was probably assuming that I was either a fallen noble who became a priest or a

servant of Lady Lucifer who came out to the world with a purpose in mind.

I didn't know exactly what he was thinking, but I was certain about one thing.

He wanted to sponsor me, as he didn't want to lose me.

“Father, I understand better than anyone how you feel,” Draktaris said.

“Father Draktaris,” I said.

“I’m sure you’re worried about what’ll happen afterwards and the impact this incident will have, but you don’t have to worry. However…” Draktaris paused.

“I think it’s best if we straighten things out so we’re on the same page,” I said.

“…”

“O Lucifer…”

“Also…” Draktaris trailed off.

‘Yeah, Templar Genny is the problem, right?’

Technically, he wasn’t one of us.

As expected, the archbishop cast a cold gaze at Templar Genny. Draktaris' guards also placed their hand on the pommel of their sword.

Genny was young, but he wasn’t *that* stupid to not notice what was going on. I was sure he also understood that he was in a pickle. It’d be a different story if there were only one guard, but there were two here.

Moreover, there were definitely more guards outside.

‘I can’t let him die here.’

A butterfly effect might happen, and I believed that he was still useful.

“He’s one of us, Father,” I argued. “I’ll make sure to talk to him. I'll tell him that he can't reveal our secret to anyone."

“But Father Draktaris…” a guard muttered.

‘Guards should remain silent.’

“Silence,” Draktaris said sternly.

“…”

“…”

“Can you promise me that?” Draktaris asked.

“I…”

“Can you swear on Lady Lucifer's name that you’ll take everything that happened today to your grave?” Draktaris asked.

‘Of course, he can.’

“I-I…” Templar Genny stuttered.

“Templar Genny,” I said.

‘I’ll support you.’

“…”

‘So that you can ensure that this important secret will remain a secret and that you'll overcome this cruel fate.’

I looked at him nervously, and he was also looking at me.

He nodded slowly, but it wasn't because he had no choice. It was all because he trusted me, which was why he was willing to make an oath. He seemed to be unaware of the fact that nothing good would happen by trusting someone whom one had just met, and I presumed that was the case because he looked like he had complete trust in me.

“I swear it, Father Draktaris. I swear on Lady Lucifer's name that I won’t tell a soul about what happened today,” Templar Genny pledged.

I have a feeling that I was going to get even closer to Templar Genny and Draktaris.

‘He's not going to say something ridiculous during the dungeon raid, right?’

* * *

— The day of destruction that the prophetic priest has spoken of has arrived! *Ahh!* Where is he?! Prophetic priest… Prophetic priest! If you’re not here, I… I!

“Prepare for battle!”

“Hey, I told you to prepare for battle!” Park Deok-Gu shouted.

— *Ahhh!* Where the hell are you?!

“Damn it!”

* * *

'Yeah, he probably won't do that.'

CHAPTER 970
ALTANUS (7)

“Thank you for helping me, Father,” Templar Genny said.

“…”

“If it wasn’t for you-”

“Templar Genny,” I interrupted.

“Yes?”

“I’m the one who caused this trouble. I don’t even know what to say… for getting you involved in this… If I had been just a bit more considerate of you…” I said.

I wouldn’t have talked about the divine message while he was here in the first place, but I did that for a reason.

I was unaware of just how big and powerful the armed forces of the Underground Temple were, and I had no idea that Draktaris was wary of Templar Genny. I hadn't considered the possibility of him getting involved in this incident.

On the outside, that was what it looked like for Templar Genny.

“…”

“…”

‘Playing with a kid is pretty easy.’

From my point of view, it was a good thing to make him feel indebted to me. He was still a child, but he was pretty strong, and he had a bright future ahead of him. Whenever there was an opportunity, it was best to seize it right away.

I wonder what I looked like in his eyes…

The priest he respected suddenly received a divine message.

I was an ill-fated priest enveloped in an indescribable light, and I was the priest who had received a divine message about the threat to the continent. I was probably born with a cruel fate—the cruel fate of having to fight against a great threat.

Kids would surely go crazy over this setting.

'On top of that, I saved his life.'

It was a bit unclear, but anyway, we were on the same boat.

Of course, he wasn't given any role.

He was nothing more than a low-level Templar, so his only role was to keep quiet.

It seemed that he thought of the same thing. Priests had a tendency to put a lot of importance on things like the Goddess' guidance, fate, and Lady Lucifer's hints.

Of course, a young individual was easily swayed, so I was convinced that Templar Genny was having thoughts like, "The Goddess has guided us to each other," or "It's my divine duty to protect and support this priest who has to face a terrible threat."

"It's not your fault, Father. You…" Templar Genny muttered.

'Yeah, I didn't have the luxury of time to think things through, and my seizure was kind of abrupt earlier.'

"I'm sure… it was difficult for you as well…" Templar Genny said.

'I should smile faintly *at him.'*

"I can't say that I'm the only one who's suffering," I said, smiling faintly.

"What?"

"I'm sure you and Father Draktaris have been having a hard time as well. Of course, I'm not saying what he did was right. Threatening you… was definitely wrong… but I believe my fault is bigger for not considering each of your positions. That's why…" I trailed off.

"…"

"…"

Templar Genny nodded, but I didn't think it meant that he agreed with me. He smiled awkwardly, looking like he was having a hard time arguing against me. Afterward, he seemed to fall into contemplation.

Then, with an awkward face, he muttered, "Excuse me… Father."

"Yes?"

"W-What will happen to the continent?" Templar Genny asked.

"That's…"

I patted his head. It was rude, but it seemed like the right thing to do because we were already best friends.

"That's… not something you need to worry about," I told him.

'Basically, trust the adults.'

"I'm sure you're worried about many things, but there are talented priests and Templars down here," I said.

"What?"

"I want you to enjoy the life you were given a little more," I answered.

"*Ah…*"

'It's fine, just let the adults handle this.'

I had to be careful about this, as he could think that I was treating him like a child and become hostile toward me.

However, this sensation had to feel new to him, as no one would ever talk to him like this. As soon as he opened his eyes, he was already a servant of Lucifer, and the Underground Temple had been pressuring him to become an adult soon.

He had given up his life to become even stronger for Lucifer.

I was sure I was the only person who had ever told him to enjoy the life he was given.

There were many adult priests here, but it was an undeniable fact that this sensation was brand-new to him. As expected, he thought I was different from the other adult priests.

“I-I’d like to help—”

“I know, Templar Genny. However, that’s not what we need right now,” I told him.

“…”

“I believe one day Lady Lucifer will use you, but that time isn’t now,” I added.

“Father…” Templar Genny mumbled.

“See more things and learn a lot until Lady Lucifer thinks you’re ready. The world is huge, beautiful, and vast. You can learn many things from the smallest things out there, and it’s a place… where you’ll always learn something new,” I told him.

“…”

I wanted him to think along the lines of this, "I had no idea what Father meant by his words at the time, but now… I feel like I finally understand." It wasn't a bad idea, and funnily enough, Templar Genny actually looked like he didn’t know what I was talking about.

I just gave him a hint about the future, but he seemed to be enjoying the warmth and comfort that I was giving him so much that it did not seem like he noticed that hint.

I patted his head again.

He seemed a bit embarrassed about it, but he didn’t seem to dislike my touch. However, it didn’t take him long to come back to his senses. He was on a mission right now, after all.

“*Ah!* F-Father. It’s time to go,” Templar Genny said.

“Looks like it’s already time,” I commented.

“Yes. Father Draktartis said he’ll prepare the uniform, so you just need to wait in the waiting room of the social gathering hall,” Templar Genny answered.

“Really?” I asked.

“You’ll be the fifth person to enter,” Templar Genny informed.

“What? Why…” I questioned.

“I believe this is his way of being considerate…” Templar Genny said.

'This is why you need to be on the right side.'

“I’ll take you there, Father,” Templar Genny offered.

“Thank you, Templar Genny,” I said.

“No problem!”

‘Originally, there was no such thing as an entry order.’

To be exact, I was an extra.

Rather than getting introduced to everyone before entering the hall, I had to enter the hall without anyone knowing it.

I couldn't get any attention, and I had to look at others with envious eyes.

This was perfect for an unknown wandering priest.

I had to be honored for even receiving an invitation.

This gathering was for the sponsors from aboveground. This was a place for those in power, the strong with special powers, and nobles or royalty with a deep history.

Powerless wandering priests, philosophers admired by the denizens, and even sages were only invited to fill in the empty seats. Of course, the former were allowed to enter "formally," while the others simply filled the empty seats without any of the

formalities.

Moreover, it wasn't like it was easy to talk to the high-ranking officials.

'Draktaris hyung has more power than I thought.'

In addition…

'The uniform isn't so bad.'

I liked the fact that it wasn't too fancy. It made me look like an introverted priest instead of a clown. It wasn't that I didn't like the clothes I brought with me, but if possible, I'd like to wear clothes that match the trend.

The Atentas stood next to me and helped me get into the uniform.

I tried my best not to look awkward.

I found this treatment to be kind of uncomfortable, but I had to act like I was used to receiving this kind of treatment. After all, my backstory was that I was a child of a noble family. If the Atentas and guards here were Draktaris' eyes and ears, then there couldn't be any contradictions in my story.

"Where is Father Draktaris…" I asked.

"He's on his way, Father," a maid answered.

Draktaris' downside was that he was hard to kill.

'He's really stubborn.'

I wasn't sure whether the expedition group had encountered him yet or not, but they had spent almost an entire day clearing the prayer room, but I had yet to hear any news about the raid from them.

I didn't really think that they were going to fail, but I was feeling frustrated.

Soon, I heard a voice outside. "Father Lee Ki-Young, are you ready?"

"Yes."

I exited and entered the waiting room. Of course, I saw the stubborn bastard there.

“You’re here,” Draktaris greeted.

“Thank you for being considerate, Father Draktaris.”

I decided to greet him first. I wasn't really a fan of situations like this, but I had to show my appreciation for his kindness.

“I’m worried that I’ve burdened you,” I added.

'I did burden you because I can feel you trying to use me for political reasons.'

“That’s not the case, Father,” Draktaris answered.

The Underground Temple was already aware that a priest who had received a divine message was here. There hadn't been any details yet, but I was sure that Draktaris would announce it soon, as he had to claim me for himself.

When it came to religious people, nothing gave more power and validation than hearing the voice of one's goddess or god. He wasn’t a corrupted priest, but it was all the more reason for him to be obsessed with me. He was going to use me for his own agenda, and I’d obtain his support as a result.

He’d announce that the priest who had received a divine message was on his side, and I…

‘I will become the star of the social gathering.’

“Father Draktaris and Lee Ki-Young, the wandering priest, have arrived!”

I stepped forward, and my favorite scenery came into view. I could feel many people looking at me. They seemed to have already heard the rumors because they were whispering to each other, and I saw others looking at me from head to toe.

Obviously, there was a certain image that they were expecting from me. They probably thought I was a devout believer, as I heard Lady Lucifer’s voice. They expected me to look like a typical upright priest.

After all, I got invited to this social gathering, even though I was just a wandering

priest.

Of course, I didn't disappoint them.

My eyes were filled with devotion and I walked as if holy power was dripping down my figure. I looked like I had gone through a lot. I had both respect and guilt toward Lady Lucifer and Saint Altanus. I was known as the Saint of Light on the continent, so I knew instinctively how I needed to act to attract the crowd.

I could sense them staring at me.

'Keep staring. Keep staring at me.'

Father Draktaris was already part of the crowd, and the room became silent.

'I'm the Saint of Light, damn it.'

"Lucifer…"

'I'm the God of Sacrifice and Revival.'

"O Lucifer…"

I heard voices that made me want to spread my wings.

If I were to show my wings, half of the people here would get down on their knees.

'The problem is that the other half will try to get a piece of me.'

Exaggeration was bad when done too much, but this was my first appearance, so I needed to make an impact. I decided to unleash a faint light, and people looked at me again.

I was sure they realized that…

'That I'm the star.'

It took no time for me to receive countless handshake requests.

Regardless of what was going to happen, I was already the star of this social

gathering.

‘I’m the star, damn it.’

CHAPTER 971
ALTANUS (8)

“Mage Marquis Klarkin has arrived!”

‘Yeah, make a grand entrance if you can.’

“The Grand Duchess of the Delia Empire and the Iron Knight, Leinburg, has arrived!”

'You’ll never get as much attention as me, even if you’re a grand duchess or a queen.'

My audience impact was so massive that I basically stole the show for this social gathering. A grand duchess, adorned with fancy ornaments and a neat-looking knight, entered the social gathering together, but they weren’t as impactful as me.

Out of courtesy, the crowd welcomed them, but the sight of the Saint of Light had already been carved in their heads.

I was the God of Sacrifice and Revival, so I was more elegant than the Grand Duchess and more charming than her knight.

It wasn’t because I was more important than them. Anyone could tell they were fancier and looked like people who would lead the continent, but titles weren’t everything.

‘We’re here to get to know each other.’

The Grand Duchess of the Delia Empire, the Iron Knight-whatever, and the noblemen… there were many amazing people here, but they were already pretty famous.

Of course, it seemed like they were meeting the believers of the Underground Temple for the first time, but people just couldn't help but become curious about me.

A random wandering priest whose name they had never heard before entered the social gathering with Father Draktaris, and he managed to grab everyone's attention

as well.

In addition, I had a dignified demeanor that people had never seen before.

At this point, everyone shared the same curiosity as Draktaris toward me.

'This is why people need to learn.'

This was why people had to learn the etiquette of a noble and royalty. Etiquette had long been carved into my body as the honorary cardinal of the Vatican.

My etiquette was different due to the difference in the era, but my unique etiquette and bearing had to be the reason why people were curious about me.

Real recognize real.

Even if I were to walk mindlessly, educated people would still identify many different things in me.

That was probably why people were cautious around me. They were wondering what kind of person I was, what kind of life I had been living all this while, and my "true" identity. They were more focused on me than that so-called mage marquis, and they gathered naturally around me.

“It’s nice to meet you, Father Lee Ki-Young.”

“Yes, it’s nice to meet you,” I greeted.

“If you don’t mind, can you give me some of your time?”

“Yes, of course,” I answered.

Of course, groups were formed around other people as well.

“*Hahaha*, I see.”

“Lady Lucifer will be pleased.”

“*Hahahaha*.”

However, the people in those groups were nothing more than side characters.

'Whenever there are several groups in one place, the loudest one wins.'

I wasn't talking about screaming frivolously.

People tend to join a friendly and lively group, and even if one were to try and look away from that group, one would find oneself stealing glances at that group.

The friendly group here was my group, and it was a gathering of educated and smart people. There were difficult conversations, but I had long gotten used to smiling and getting along with nobles.

I praised Lucifer's greatness to the renowned priests, while I praised and blessed the houses of distant nobles with high self-esteem.

I gave them compliments that other nobles with high self-esteem wouldn't give them. I made it seem like I was approachable, causing more people to gather around me.

When one person called someone over, another would call someone else, and so on.

"There's someone I want to introduce you to, Father."

"It'll be an honor," I said.

"I'm Bahan, a bishop. It's nice to meet you," Bahan introduced.

'Yeah, you're worthless.'

"It's nice to meet you, Father Bahan. I heard a lot about you from Father Draktaris," I said.

"You embarrass me. I don't know what Father Draktaris told you, but I'm not anyone amazing, Father… *Haha*…" Bahan laughed.

There were a few worthless people here like him, but people like him usually had connections to important figures.

"Come to think of it, I heard that a radiant light spread in the private prayer rooms.

Do you happen to be…” Bahan paused.

“…”

“Father Lee Ki-Young…” Bahan muttered.

“I’m a nobody, but I received Miss Lucifer’s blessing,” I said.

“*Haha*… so it was you… It’s been so long,” Bahan said.

I was even blessed.

An invisible territorial battle ensued in the middle of the gathering, but this wasn’t really important for the priests, as their goal was to look good in front of the sponsors here. On the other hand, the sponsors were on edge about this territorial battle because people like them couldn't live unless they were the protagonist.

That was why the Grand Duchess couldn't stop glancing over at me.

Her pride did not allow her to approach me first, but she was definitely curious about me as well. She was wondering why there were so many people around me, and why there was so much laughter around us.

And that was when I heard a loud voice.

“Why?!”

“…”

“…”

It was an event.

‘It’s been a while since I saw an event like this.’

It was an event that often happened in social gatherings.

I was talking about problematic people. They'd show up sometimes and cause some trouble.

I had attended many social gatherings before, but I never really encountered that many troublesome people. A typical example of those troublesome people were arrogant pieces of trash rude to a lady or a rude drunkard kicking up a fuss.

A social gathering was a gathering of many people from all walks of life, so one or two participants were bound to cause some trouble.

The guards were supposed to stop troublesome people from kicking up a fuss, but those people were often influential or in power, which meant that the guards couldn't really do much about them.

In other words, the group itself would have to step up to resolve the issue.

Usually, the one who'd step up to deal with that issue would become the star of the social gathering.

'It's great timing as well.'

It was time for men and women to hold hands and start dancing, but I couldn't do that. Nobles from powerful families looked a bit disappointed, and it was understandable since they lived to show off their dancing skills to other people.

"Why aren't you going to provide support?! You promised that the Underground Temple would provide support," a woman shouted.

"I already told you many times that I cannot dispatch the Templars or the Holy Knights whenever I want. There's not enough evidence!" the man argued.

"There's plenty of evidence. You have to read the reports that the association has created. There are already hundreds of them," the woman replied.

"An army was dispatched a year ago, but nothing happened. Have you ever thought about the resources we had to spend for that? Reports aren't enough. There's a process to everything. I can't dispatch them just because I want to," the man said.

"It's different this time. We… We all need to join forces," the woman said.

"*Tsk…*"

"Everyone, please listen to me," the woman declared.

‘I don’t think he’s drunk.’

“That’s enough,” the man told her.

“We all need to join forces…” the man argued.

A man and a woman were arguing in the distance.

They were talking about resources, so the woman had probably asked for the help of the Underground Temple’s armed forces, but it wasn’t approved.

The best thing to do was to meditate, and the others seemed to have thought of the same thing.

The hyenas of the social gathering moved forward to intervene, but…

“Please listen to me!” the woman shouted.

“Please stop this, Metel!” the man yelled.

I had to use a slightly different method to resolve this issue.

[Creating a Rare-rank Quest.]

[Go crazy like you’re having a seizure. (0/1)]

The woman looked confused.

[I’ll take care of your problem. (0/1)]

Our eyes met, and the woman cast a confused gaze at me.

[No one will listen to you. The people here aren’t interested in what you have to say, and your problem isn't really a problem in their minds. This social gathering was created for the sponsors who have been maintaining the Underground Temple. You really think they’ll provide support? Why not take my advice? I think I can help you. (0/1)]

The woman looked away from me and looked around. It seemed like she was sure that the voice was coming from somewhere else.

[I know about the threat you're talking about, and I know the proper way to deal with it, so I won't repeat myself. I'm not the one who has something to lose here. Go crazy like you're having a seizure. (0/1)]

I had nothing to lose, and she had no other choice.

"Listen to me!" the woman roared and started going crazy. "This isn't the time to party like this!"

It seemed like she was being somewhat sincere.

"Calm down! Metel! This is not the place for this!" the man shouted.

"Why won't you believe me?! Why?!" the woman yelled.

"I told you that we can't help you! You have to bring clearer evidence, and we also have… many issues to consider. Don't do this here, okay? Go to the Magic Tower…"

The Magic Tower wasn't going to do anything. In fact, the reason she came to the Underground Temple was that she couldn't convince them up there. It seemed that she had also received an invitation to this gathering.

"I'll tell Saint Altanus myself! Let me meet her!" the woman demanded.

"Please keep calm!" the man begged.

"The continent is in danger, everyone!" the woman yelled.

"Take her away!" the man ordered.

"Let go of me!"

[You know what to do when there's a flash of light, right? I believe you're quick-witted enough to know what to do. (0/1)]

The situation was about to get ugly.

The hyenas of the social gathering seemed to have thought that there was no other way than to drag her out as they watched with their hands behind their backs.

Meanwhile, the guards exchanged glances.

This is where the protagonist ought to make his appearance.

I walked slowly just like I did earlier.

The onlookers moved to the side as if they were possessed by something, and I could finally see what was going on. I saw a furious woman with tears in her eyes, and I saw a man trying to suppress her with his cohorts.

“Please step aside," I said with a serious tone of voice and quietly unleashed a light.

A light that was starkly different from holy power spread out, and it enveloped the woman.

I didn’t want to say this with my own mouth, but it was a *really* radiant light.

Everyone’s jaw dropped as they looked at the light. The woman closed her eyes slowly, and the light seemed to calm her down as if it were a sedative. Of course, it didn’t have that kind of effect, but she clearly knew what I wanted her to do.

The light held her as she collapsed to the floor. The room became silent again and all the sponsors, including Draktaris, looked really surprised. They seemed intoxicated by the radiant light that they had just witnessed.

“Can you please provide us with a place to rest? I’ll look after her,” I requested.

The first day flew like that, but I wasn’t sad about it. It was actually better to leave amidst the praises and applause. I was sure everyone would talk about what happened just now, and in the end, today's events would help me greatly tomorrow.

However, I now had a problem to face.

I turned toward the actress who performed wonderfully.

[It’s because of the rift, right? (0/1)]

The woman before me was Max’s creator and my spiritual wife—Guardian of the Rift Metel.

CHAPTER 972
ALTANUS (9)

Metel stared at me in surprise. She had long blonde hair and noticeably long eyelashes. She also had the same face as the statue of hers in Rift Land. Her statue and my statue in Rift Land looked friendly, and it was accurate because Metel actually looked friendly.

'I'm happy to see her for some reason.'

It was my first time seeing Metel in person, but I was happy to see her.

Whenever I spent time with Max, about eighty percent of his stories were about her.

Of course, I rarely listened because I couldn't really relate.

All I could remember was that Max wouldn't stop saying that she was the kindest among the guardians he had ever interacted with. He also talked about the good memories he shared with her.

Even though I often never really listened to Max's words, I was happy to see her.

Perhaps I felt this way because Max talked so much about her.

Of course, I was the only one who felt this way.

In stark contrast, Max's mother looked a bit nervous, and it was all because I was trying to create a friendly atmosphere between us. She seemed careful even about her words.

She was listening to me, but she was really cautious, and most importantly…

'She has her guard up.'

A few moments later, she finally talked. "Who… are you?"

'I can't tell her that we had a spiritual marriage.'

"My name is Lee Ki-Young," I introduced myself.

"I wasn't asking—"

"I'm a wandering priest aboveground, but here, I'm known as the priest who has received a divine message… but that's not really important, right? The important thing is that I can help you," I interrupted her.

"The voice in my head…" Metel said.

"*Ah*, that could become a problem…" I muttered.

"Who… are you…" she repeated.

If the quests I had given her were the reason behind her confusion, then it would make sense. After all, only gods and goddesses could give out quests using holy power.

The method and type were different, but people could easily be misled into thinking that they had received a divine message or had established some kind of connection with a divine being.

To put it simply, Rift Guardian Metel felt traces of the God of Sacrifice and Revival from me.

"Are you…"

"What? Do I look like a god to you? Do I look like a reincarnation or an avatar of a god? Do you feel like you heard the voice of a transcendent being?" I asked.

"…"

"I understand, but don't think about anything else for now and just look at what's in front of you. Things that can't be understood happen quite often here.

"For example, there's that rift you're worried about and there's Saint Altanus. I also feel the same way. If you think I'm an avatar of God, feel free to think that way. Anyway, I'll tell you how I know about it," I told her.

“…”

“It's because I can see into the future,” I said.

I wasn’t wrong.

“Your worries will become reality. The rift will open, and monsters will fall from it,” I told her.

“What?”

“The continent will become a literal hell. The incompetent priests and powerful figures on the surface world will not listen to you. I’m sure you’re already aware… but it’s such a ridiculous story.

"Another dimension and a rift… anyone would think that you're crazy if you were to talk about that with them," I said.

“…”

“It really doesn’t matter whether they believe you or not. Even I think that it sounds absurd, but one thing I’m sure of is that I can do what you want,” I said.

“Really?” she asked.

“The continent wouldn't collapse, and it was all because you and a few guardians had carried out your missions wonderfully. Do you still use the title Rift Guardian?” I asked.

“Rift Guardian…” she mumbled. It seemed that she had never heard of that before.

‘Do I need to tell her everything? Come to think of it… ’

The technology to create the Rift Museum wasn't from this era.

I visited the library and spent quite some time reading the documents there, but the technology of this era couldn't create Max or the museum’s system.

Metel was known as the genius of the century, but technological advancement wasn't that easy to bring about. The Goddess’ Mirror and the Goddess’ Hand Mirror needed

a system to function, and the system itself had hundreds and thousands of sub-systems that had their own instructions to fulfill so that those two items would function properly.

‘This, too?’

'This damned continent is doomed without me.'

I was biting my nails, thinking about my next steps.

And that was when I heard knocking on the door…

“Hold on—”

Before I could finish my sentence, someone entered the room.

“Miss Benigoa?”

Benigoa didn’t even look at me. After barging into the room, she proceeded to clean the room aggressively. She took her anger out on the cushions by hitting them hard and pushing Metel and my feet away while mopping the floor.

‘What’s wrong with her?’

'Wait, she must be jealous.'

I observed her for a bit and noticed that it was more like she was furious rather than jealous. In her eyes, she saw the priest—who had spoken sweet words to her—leave the gathering with a woman he met right there and then.

‘I’m sure Benigoa was one of the Atentas in that massive gathering… ’

I told her I'd come looking for her, but I hadn't done that yet, so she was probably expecting me to find her soon. Based on her personality, I was sure she thought that fate would lead us to meet at the gathering, or we'd end up having a rendezvous after the gathering.

However, she saw the priest disappear with Metel, and the sight left her furious. In the end, she followed the priest, which led to where we were right now.

“Ah…”

"Can you move your feet please? I need to clean,” Benigoa said.

‘She really is like a child.’

“Why is the room so dirty? And there's actually trash just lying around…” Benigoa mumbled.

‘She isn’t calling me trash, is she?’

“Are you okay, Miss Metel? You didn’t fall for a certain someone who must have already spoken sweet words to you, did you?” Benigoa asked.

‘What’s wrong with you? Can’t you see that we’re having a serious conversation right now?’

As expected, Metel put her guard back up.

“Excuse me… Miss Benigoa?” I said.

“Who’s Benigoa? I’m an Atenta. Looks like you’ve had many Benigoas up there,” Benigoa said.

“…” “It’s a misunderstanding, Miss Benigoa,” I told her.

“I knew you were going to say that, but I’m not stupid, Father. I-I didn’t accept you in the first place, but you really are a… lewd and obscene person,” Benigoa said.

‘That’s a bit harsh… I’m not like that.’

“Liar. You’re a womanizer who's good at speaking sweet words,” Benigoa added.

“Excuse me, Miss Benigoa. I think there’s been some kind of misunderstanding. I’ve been talking about business with Miss Metel—”

“You’re done, Father,” Benigoa interrupted.

Benigoa seemed to be thinking that she looked cool, but I could see tears in her eyes.

‘She’s hurt.’

She was obviously hurt by the way she was acting. To be honest, there wasn't anything between us. We only spoke a few times, and we promised to eat together; that was all. I considered the possibility that perhaps doing all of that was the same thing as proposing in her eyes, but it didn’t seem to be the case.

‘I’m pretty sure she was just imagining all sorts of things by herself.’

Benigoa’s behavior made it difficult for me to determine whether she was naive or stupid.

“I’m… done with you, Father,” Benigoa said. It seemed that she wanted to look cool until the end because she slammed the door shut

However, I did not bother chasing after her.

‘I just need to film a heartbreaking drama with her later.’

Metel was important to me right now.

“That woman… just now…”

“It looks like there was some kind of misunderstanding. You don’t have to worry about what she said,” I told her.

“It’s not that…”

‘Looks like she’s trying to run.’

Before Metel could say anything, I decided to make a move.

I put my hand in my pocket, and Metel grabbed the staff that fell to the ground because of Benigoa's aggressive cleaning. However, she stared in bewilderment at what I had taken out of my pocket. It was a Goddess' Hand Mirror, but Metel had never seen anything like it before.

What happened next was pretty obvious. Instead of operating the Goddess’ Hand Mirror, it’d be easier for her to understand if I just showed her how it was made and how it worked.

I infused my mana into it, and a light spread out from the hand mirror, pervading the entire room.

The room became filled with holograms depicting geometric patterns and strange formulas. I honestly didn't understand all of this, either.

I knew the main system and how it worked, but the main system was the type to become more and more complicated, the deeper one dove into it.

Metel staggered backward when the holograms appeared, but her bewilderment did not last long. Her jaw dropped to the floor, and she stared wide-eyed at the scene before her.

'Looks like she has an idea about what these are… '

A large system that becomes the foundation of the Rift Museum and the program that maintained the museum before I entered the dungeon. It's what turned Metel and the others into Rift Guardians.

'I can't hand over the Goddess' Hand Mirror.'

It wasn't that likely, but there was a possibility of her losing the hand mirror, or they could advance faster than my expectations. I decided to provide just the basic clues, as that was probably the reason why the museum's hardware was so bulky.

If they were to recreate the Goddess' Hand Mirror using my technology, the hardware would only get bigger.

"You think you can make it?" I asked.

"…"

"I asked if you can make this," I repeated.

"N-No way…" Metel stuttered.

"There are four things I would like to ask in return for handing over this technology to you," I requested.

"…"

“First, you must ensure that there aren't going to be any information leaks,” I said.

“…”

“I’ll refer to you and the few people who will work with you as Rift Guardians. This technology shall only become available to the guardians. I don’t really remember all their names, but you should recruit Jaime and Sneff. *Ah!* Additionally, you should have a ranking system; you need to categorize information into ranks,” I suggested.

“…”

“Secondly, create an autonomous dummy that would manage the entire system. It would protect and research information about the rift inside a place called the Rift Museum.

"This is something we can discuss while I’m here. There are many things for us to discuss, such as the overall design and the rates of the lottery system… It’ll be harder than you think, so you’ll have to learn quickly,” I informed her.

“How… d-did you…” Metel stammered.

‘She has no idea what to say.’

Metel looked like someone witnessing civilization for the first time. Actually, that was true, as I had just shown her technology that she couldn't have imagined even in her wildest dreams.

“Thirdly, I want you to help me out a bit while I’m here,” I said.

“…”

“I’m kind of lonely… and I need someone to be my hands and feet… this social gathering is like a w-war zone. It'd be nice to have someone I can talk to without feeling comfortable about it. And lastly…” I trailed off.

“…”

“You have to forget me,” I told her.

Metel stared wide-eyed at me.

CHAPTER 973
ALTANUS (10)

“Then I’ll take that as a yes, Guardian Metel,” I said.

‘She still hasn’t come to her senses.’

“…”

“…”

“First of all, give me some time to organize the formulas necessary to create the program's foundation. As I mentioned earlier, you won’t have a lot of time to learn them. I don’t think I’ll have much time to spend with you,” I told her.

“What? How am I supposed to do this alone…” Metel muttered.

“I think my role is to lay the foundation,” I answered.

“Didn’t you say you would spend time with me?” Metel asked.

“I’ll guide you in the overall direction, but I won’t explain every single detail to you. I told you, didn’t I? I have things to do as well. I was serious when I asked you to be my hands and feet,” I reminded her.

“…”

“…”

“What… do I need to do?” Metel asked.

There was a lot to do. First of all, she had to inform me of her connections by submitting a report about it. Then, she'd explore the Underground Temple in my place.

‘I don’t have enough time.’

At first, I was worried about spending too much time here, but now, I was worried about not having enough time here, as I had many things to do.

I had to keep delivering information about the dungeon to the future, and I had to ensure that Benigoa would become holy. Not only did I have to take control of this social gathering and prepare the foundation to drag Saint Altanus down, but I also had to find a way to weaken the power of the Templars.

Moreover, I had just received a mission to train the Rift Guardians, so I was overloaded with work.

Of course, the foundation for bringing Saint Altanus down was already prepared. Some of the awakened priests, including Father Draktaris, were already on the move.

Since the rock had already been thrown into the pond, there was no stopping the ripples. Once the social gathering was over, they'd gather and come up with a solution. After Altanus' downfall, they would then decide their own path.

'For now, I just need to ruin the Templars and Father Draktaris' relationship.'

It was still in progress. Actually, it was highly likely that it'd happen on its own without me getting involved. Draktaris had attempted to kill Templar Genny, so he obviously wasn't very fond of the Templars.

Based on the situation, I wasn't expecting a coup, but it was undeniable that he was trying his best to maintain this delicate power balance in the Underground Temple. I saw that clearly during the social gathering.

'Did I do something wrong… or am I missing something?'

A few things were making me nervous. First of all…

'It's strange that they still haven't defeated Draktaris.'

I was worried that I was giving Draktaris more power than he actually needed.

The prayer room was big, and if they were raiding at a steady pace, it would take them some time to clear it.

However, the fact that it was taking this long made me think of the possibility that he

was getting stronger because of me and the possibility that he was growing stronger even now.

When I thought about the complex power structure within the underground world, it was possible that the Templars weren't the only ones he was wary of. It was inevitable that others would grow weaker once he grew stronger, but the fact that there might be casualties in the raid made me feel like I was having a headache.

'Is there a way to recruit Draktaris as an allied NPC?'

It was a bad decision.

Regardless of whether it was possible or not, it was worth a try. If I could make Draktaris even more hostile against the Templars and make him feel like getting rid of them was his long-cherished wish, his soul could end up helping the expedition group.

"I'm going to go take care of some work," I told her.

"Wait. Come to think of it…" Metel paused.

The gathering was still in progress, but it wasn't the right time to go back.

The first place I visited was the place where Atentas were located.

'I need to talk to Benigoa again.'

"Hello," I greeted.

"Hello, Father. How can I help you?" an Atenta asked.

"I'm looking for an Atenta with brown hair and freckles on her nose. She's the cute… and… beautiful… Benigoa…" I answered.

"*Ah!*"

Then, I saw them whispering amongst themselves. I wasn't sure whether Benigoa had already told them about the recent incident, but their gazes toward me weren't friendly at all.

'Looks like the rumor has already spread.'

"I'm sorry, but the Atenta you're looking for is currently busy with other work…" the Atenta informed me.

"It'll only be for a moment," I begged.

I was sure Benigoa had already told them not to tell me her location.

"I- I'm not sure. I'll try talking to her, but—"

"Can you tell her that I'll be waiting in the library?" I requested.

"What?"

"Tell her that I'll be staying in the library and will wait for her until she comes," I told her.

It was so cliched. A man with a pure heart waiting in one place until the arrival of a certain someone. Honestly, I was certain that this was going to work. Rather than saying that she'd come to me because she genuinely wanted to have a conversation with me, it was highly likely that she'd come, as she found the situation to be quite enjoyable.

'She's a drama queen.'

I didn't want to acknowledge it, but Benigoa and I had some similarities.

'I understand that feeling, too.'

I could understand what she was going through.

A priest from aboveground was waiting for her in the middle of the night.

Of course, there was a small misunderstanding, but everything was a test so that our relationship could take one step forward. We were also going to talk about the misunderstanding in the place where we first met—the library.

Drama queens would always appear on stage before thinking about whether they wanted to appear or not. Upon hearing the news, she wouldn't be able to resist

coming here. If I were Benigoa…

'I would go regardless of the result.'

"Please let her know," I begged.

I obviously looked sad. The Atentas here would deliver the current situation to Benigoa, so it was right to show them a face full of regret. Even the way I dragged myself out of there was perfect.

I headed slowly to the place where Benigoa and I first met.

'I need to deliver a quest, anyway.'

I also need to check in to see if the expedition group was doing well right now.

Once I was done, I would then act like I had been desperately waiting for Benigoa. I'd either bite my fingernails to show anxiety or pace around in one place, as people would usually do that to vent out their anxiety.

As expected, I saw Benigoa peeping at me nearby.

The smile tugging at her lips told me that she was satisfied with the current situation. This was kind of different, but it was like I was looking at Ji-Hye noona when she and I were pretending to be Lee Ji-Hoo and Lee Ki-Yeon.

'Hurry up.'

Perhaps she wanted to see me become more anxious, but it took her a while to appear.

The drama queen wriggled her fingers while walking up to me and staring at me with a sad gaze.

"Miss Benigoa!" I greeted.

"W-What do you think you're doing, Father?" Benigoa questioned.

"…"

“Did you think calling me out here would resolve anything?” Benigoa asked.

“…”

“I have my own circumstances as well. I have work to take care of as an Atenta… and my own problems… D-Don’t you think it’s really rude… to thoughtlessly… ask my co-workers to deliver a message to me?” Benigoa complained.

“It’s nothing like that, Miss Benigoa,” I told her.

“*Hmph.* There you go again with that smooth talk… The more I see you, the more disappointed… I… get—”

I took a huge step forward, and Benigoa couldn't finish her sentence. She looked shocked, clearly not expecting me to do something like this. I took another step forward, and she revealed an expectant look.

‘No, it’s nothing like that.’

“Suddenly approaching me like this is…” Benigoa mumbled.

“Miss Benigoa, I swear to the Goddess that my feelings are still the same as the first time we met,” I told her.

I grabbed Benigoa’s hand and placed it on my chest, allowing her to feel my pounding heart. Benigoa looked pretty satisfied upon feeling my pounding heart, but her expression remained slightly cold to ensure that I wouldn't notice her satisfaction.

“W-What about… Miss Metel…” Benigoa asked.

“All I see is you, Miss Benigoa,” I told her.

“Even if you tell me that…”

It honestly wasn’t a romantic feeling because my heart wasn't actually racing, nor did I feel nervous around her.

‘This is pretty strange as well.’

To be exact, it was like we were playing.

Just like whenever Ji-Hye noona and I were acting, I would create a situation and act out the character that was suitable for me.

It wouldn't be strange if I were the only person who thought that way, but Benigoa seemed to be thinking the same thing as me. Actually, I was pretty certain that it was the case, and she probably thought that she was the one leading this play.

'It's probably because we're both drama queens… '

But I had to think if I was doing something wrong or if I was missing something.

"I just thought of something I needed to do, Father. I-I'll be going now!" Benigoa shouted.

"…"

"Also…" Benigoa trailed off. Then, Benigoa kissed my cheek while making sure to generate a kissing sound "I fully understand how you feel, Father," Benigoa said before running out of the library.

'I feel uncomfortable for some reason… '

I felt really uncomfortable, and it was because of Benigoa's sudden kiss.

'Draktaris… the raid… '

'No, don't suddenly think about Draktaris. Think back to the beginning about Benigoa.'

"Why did Benigoa pretend like she doesn't know me?"

Why was that? She definitely didn't lose her memories. I knew she didn't like talking about her life as a human, but I had a feeling that wasn't the case at all. When I looked at the current Benigoa, it felt like she had never really lived her life as a human…

'Is that Atenta not Benigoa? Was I wrong?'

Many thoughts came into my mind. The things Benigoa had said to me up until now

and her attitude played in my head as if they were cross-cut.

How did Metel react when she saw Benigoa?

“That woman… just now…”

“It looks like there was some kind of misunderstanding. You don’t have to worry about what she said,” I told her.

“It’s not that…”

What was Metel trying to say before looking at the Goddess’ Hand Mirror?

'At the entrance of the Underground Temple, why was Benigoa’s—'

It was so obvious. I already knew the answer, but I hadn't been able to think about it for some reason.

'Yeah, it's like a part of my memories were erased because it’s something I don’t want to even think about.’

It felt like I was preventing myself from knowing the answer.

And as if I had been waiting for it, I heard Metel’s voice.

“Did you have a good time with Saint Altanus?” asked Metel.

CHAPTER 974
ALTANUS (11)

"…"

"It's been a while since I saw Saint Altanus having that much fun. Of course, it's been a while since I actually met her… I couldn't even greet her properly because she suddenly came in… Do you know her, Father? Did she say anything about me…" Metel asked.

"…"

"I expected it, but it seemed like they didn't want me to meet Saint Altanus," Metel added.

"…"

"Come to think of it… this item called the hand mirror… and now Saint Altanus… Father, just who…" Metel trailed off.

"…"

"So about Saint Altanus…" Metel trailed off.

"Saint Altanus…" I repeated.

"Yes, about her… Do you—" Metel paused.

Metel couldn't hide her sudden surprise, and I could tell she was trying to read my reaction despite saying all that just now. I wasn't sure whether it was because I didn't look so good or she had realized her mistake, but she went quiet.

"Is it true that the Atenta who came into the room just now is Saint Altanus?" I asked.

"That's…" Metel paused.

I asked the question but I didn’t hear the answer because I already knew the answer.

‘Benigoa was Altanus.’

“Benigoa was Altanus…” I mumbled.

The answer wasn't that hard to reach if one were to think about it.

Her image was carved at the dungeon entrance of the Mole Saint’s Cozy Sanctuary.

Nothing else was more convincing evidence than that.

Her actions were clearly different from the other Atentas.

The Underground Temple was a special institute, but Atentas was clearly the lowest class within the temple. Her behavior didn't fit someone whose name was taken away by someone saying something ridiculous like she had to serve the Goddess.

Like acting out a character written down on a character sheet, the awkwardness I felt from her didn’t seem so awkward anymore. She was actually acting like an Atenta, and she was doing a bad job at it, too. I just felt stupid for not noticing it.

‘No, I wouldn’t go so far as calling myself stupid.’

I had to have noticed it when I first saw Benigoa, and even if that hadn't been the case, I had to have noticed it at some point.

I was the one blocking out my thoughts and memories about the truth.

Like last time, I had to have erased my memories this time as well. I was in full control of myself and if it hadn't been for Metel, my subconscious would have continued interrupting me until the end.

“Father… are you okay?” Metel asked.

“…”

“Father?” Metel repeated.

“Yes, I’m fine, Miss Metel,” I answered.

"…"

"By the way… would you like some coffee?" I offered.

"No, I—"

"You should have some if you're going to stay up all night studying," I interrupted her.

"Did I… make a mistake," Metel asked.

"No, it's not a big deal, so don't worry. Here you go. If you have questions, write it all down, and I'll take a look tomorrow morning," I instructed her.

"Thank… you," Metel mumbled.

"I'm going to go into my room and organize some things, Miss Metel," I told her.

"O-Okay," she said.

I started to understand the burning questions in my head and the reason why the timeline was unclear to me. I understood why Benigoa couldn't remember this world and why she inherited Altanus' will.

'Altanus' existence was erased.'

Altanus had entered the iron maiden herself, causing the continent of the past to go down the path of destruction… The story took place after the continent's manager, Lucifer, was demoted.

The story began after a new order, a new civilization, and a new continent was established. I wasn't familiar with this world, but Kim Hyun-Sung knew it very well.

'His first life.'

Altanus had sacrificed herself in exchange for turning Kim Hyun-Sung into a regressor.

Up until now, I thought that meant total extinction, but there was a chance that it wasn't the case at all—no, it definitely wasn't the case. Altanus had disappeared, but Benigoa, who had inherited her will, was still alive.

Although her memories, character, and everything else had disappeared, the continent's system had left behind Benigoa's shell to take care of things after her.

Of course, Benigoa wasn't *just* a shell.

To be exact, she was a formatted piece of hardware. A computer fresh out of a clean reinstall.

I was sure Kim Hyun-Sung didn't find anything strange when Altanus' name was replaced with Benigoa. It was highly likely that some of the higher-ups didn't find anything strange either.

'The system probably did that.'

Not even Benigoa felt that something was amiss…

This was Altanus' role. She'd enter the iron maiden and ascend to become one of the Goddesses up there. She would then take care of the continent, and she'd eventually sacrifice herself for Kim Hyun-Sung.

I was aware of that fact as well—no, I was in the process of becoming aware of that fact. Regardless of what was going to happen, the future had to proceed according to the timeline that I knew, and my subconscious had to have done something to prevent me from recalling the truth.

'I needed to completely erase my personal feelings.'

Was it because I might sympathize with the tragedy that Altanus had experienced?

'No, I'm not that nice.'

It had nothing to do with Altanus' tragic ending.

It was because of the possibility that I might confuse Benigoa with Altanus.

'Actually, it might be better to say that I'd sympathize with Altanus' tragic ending.'

That sounded better, too…

This was the summary of my memory issues…

God of Sacrifice and Revival Lee Ki-Young found Altanus to be quite pitiful, and he was heartbroken by her tragic fate and hardships. However, Lee Ki-Young knew that the future had to proceed according to the timeline he knew, so in the end, he decided to sacrifice his memories and subconscious.

It was necessary to ensure that a variable wouldn't be born due to his feelings of pity toward her. A variable capable of changing the future couldn't be allowed to appear. Otherwise, the butterfly effect would change the current continent.

'The problem is that I figured it out.'

Of course, nothing would change just because I became aware of it.

'This is for Benigoa as well.'

Altanus wasn't one of my people.

'I just need to be a little more cool-headed.'

Benigoa was my baby. Her shell was Altanus, but what was inside her was Benigoa.

Benigoa was here *because* Altanus had disappeared.

Altanus had to complete her mission so that Benigoa would stay as her current self.

'And there's really nothing that I can do at this point.'

Even if I were to find another way, I had no time to change the course. The timeline was already flowing the way I knew it would flow. Except for this, there was no other way to put the future and the past all on the same timeline.

'The plan must proceed.'

I felt this need better than anyone.

If Benigoa's cheesy lore about how she was actually Altanus' shadow wasn't there, then the theories I came up with would end up being true.

"Are there any other variables?"

I checked Benigoa's status window using Mind's Eye, but…

'Altanus could have made it so that Mind's Eye wouldn't see through her true status window… '

Of course, there was also a chance that my subconscious was playing a trick on me.

It wasn't likely, but Lucifer could have done something as well.

It was a meaningless assumption, but if Lucifer and I wanted the same thing, then it was possible.

What if all of this was the process of succession rather than the downfall of Lucifer?

What if all this was part of her plan, and she wasn't actually being chased out?

'Maybe she looked really far ahead… '

If she had abandoned the continent after doing everything she wanted to do, then she'd agree to cooperate with me. If this meaningless assumption had some truth to it… then she'd be worse than Elune.

It would be right to call her a waste product that couldn't be recycled.

She'd be more of a demon than a goddess.

While I was quietly thinking of any other variables, I heard a voice outside.

"Father, it's Templar Genny."

'Damn it, I'm busy.'

"I'll be right there, Templar Genny," I answered.

When I went outside, I saw Templar Genny and Guardian Metel looking at each other awkwardly. Of course, I had to greet them with a smile.

"I hope you're feeling better, Miss Metel," I said.

"I am…" Metel answered.

Metel seemed to be uncomfortable, as the two kept exchanging glances, so when I invited them inside, I saw her bending slightly forward to enter my room.

“Thank you for your hard work, Templar Genny,” I said.

“It’s fine, Father. I’m sorry this is all the help I can give you. I was pretty busy as well… so I’m not sure if I properly completed the task you gave me…” Templar Genny said.

I made Templar Genny attend the social gathering in my place because I needed someone to fill my spot. I gave him simple instructions like collecting letters or listening to what others were saying.

I was sure the true higher-ups had delivered their message through Father Draktaris, but Father Draktaris wasn’t my servant. I was sure there were things they wanted to tell me directly. More importantly, Draktaris was busier than me, so he didn’t have time to take care of me.

“I want to know if the social gathering went well. I hope that I didn’t make many people uncomfortable,” I said.

“That’s not true, Father. They are praising your holy power and virtue,” Templar Genny said, denying my claims.

‘Really? I knew that was going to happen.’

“So many people wanted to talk to you… so I had to create a list of people who will spend time with you tomorrow at the social gathering. First, there’s the promise with the Grand Duchess and the other Archbishops…” Templar Genny added.

‘It was an obvious reaction.’

I would have been disappointed if they hadn't shown any reaction.

“I thought you wouldn’t have enough time so I didn’t give a few people an answer… I think it’s best if you take a look and decide,” Templar Genny suggested.

“That…” I trailed off, "That kind of attention is kind of burdensome. I’m not anyone important."

“That’s not true. I overheard the other priests talking about you… and they said that you might be a saint chosen by the Goddess… They also said that you’re a huge blessing to the Underground Temple,” Templar Genny added.

‘I’m not really happy about that.’

Regardless, many other thoughts popped into my head. I was thinking about something random when I heard Templar Genny say, “Saint chosen by the Goddess.”

I tried to come up with a way to put both the future and the past on the same timeline.

‘Why was I called here?’

A way to assemble a future that would fit the timeline better than Plan A.

‘What if… I’m Altanus?’

It was a ridiculous assumption.

CHAPTER 975
ALTANUS (12)

“It’s a very moving story,” Deliha commented.

“You are too kind. I was just doing my job as a servant of Lady Lucifer, Lady Deliha,” I said.

“So you were active in the Land of Nejesca, right? Where exactly is that…” Lady Deliha asked.

“It was a small village with no name,” I answered.

“I’m embarrassed. Actually, the long-standing conflict in the Land of Nejesca… was partly mediated by Deliha Empire—”

“My lady,” Lord Len Burk interrupted.

“I’m not here to talk about the corruption of the empire, Lord Len Burk. I’m simply speaking the truth. Even a child knows that the conflict in the Land of Nejesca occurred because of the petty pride between the Deliha Empire and the Valinarian Empire. Don’t you agree, Sir Clarkin?” Lady Deliha asked.

“This is embarrassing,” Sir Clarkin commented.

“Even the magic marquis of the Valinarian Empire agrees. An unknown priest has been providing support on the issue the two empires have been ignoring,” Lady Deliha said.

“The actions both empires took after is a bit unfortunate, but…” I trailed off.

“What?”

“I don’t think the petty pride that the Grand Duchess had mentioned is petty at all. Competition is the greatest driving force for human development. In the eyes of narrow-minded people… it'll be unfortunate that there needs to be competition, but

when you look at the bigger picture—I can't really list all the things that the two empires had done to benefit humanity.

"The development of magic is for the sake of comfort and safety while the development of technology is for the sake of convenience and prosperity," I explained.

"Are you saying the two empires did nothing wrong, Father?" Lady Deliha asked.

"If you're asking my personal opinion…"

"I asked such an obvious question," Lady Deliha commented.

"Obviously, I don't think it's wrong to sacrifice a small amount of people for the greater good," I paused.

"Despite that… You're just telling me the things that I want to hear," Lady Deliha said.

"The important thing is to share," I explained.

"So that's the reason for the bribe earlier. Don't you agree, Sir Clarkin?" Lady Deliha asked.

"*Haha*, I felt this earlier, but this is no ordinary bet. Are you asking us to support the duchy?" Clarkin asked.

"It won't be bad for both empires either as long as it can inspire pride and self-esteem as denizens of the empire. On top of that…" I trailed off.

"…"

"Like I mentioned earlier. Competition is the greatest driving force for human development," I continued.

"*Hahahahaha*."

"You hurt the petty pride of the two empires, Father. Are you suggesting they compete with each other to see how much support they can provide?" she asked.

"I never said that," I answered.

“It’s inspiring something inside me, Father. *Hahaha!*” Lord Len Burk laughed.

‘You don’t even know how I feel, damn it.’

“Come to think of it, did you say you learned alchemy as well?” the Grand Duchess asked.

“I do. Of course, it can’t be compared to Sir Clarkin who’s known as the mage marquis…” I replied.

“No cutting in line, Sir Clarkin. Father Lee Ki-Young and I have things to talk about regarding theology,” Lord Len Burk said.

“I see… if you don’t mind, I’d like to join you… Can I?” Sir Clarkin asked.

“It’ll be more fun if you join us,” I answered.

“…”

“However, we’ll have to put *that* off for a bit since we’ve been keeping the important guest…” Sir Clarkin suggested.

“*Haha*, you’re right,” Len Burk said.

‘This is why being popular is tiring.’

I was surrounded by Grand Duchess Deliha, Iron Knight Len Burk, and Mage Marquis Clarkin—the three most popular figures here, so many people were glancing over at us.

Influential people from both the Underground Temple and the surface world were looking for an opportunity to attend this social gathering.

Of course, the social gathering for the lower classes wasn’t all that different. People had gathered even around Metel, who was with me yesterday, so they had to be trying to get some benefits from her. It was better to do that than not get any information.

“Looks like Lady Deliha has a lot to say to Father Lee Ki-Young,” Draktaris chimed in.

“Father Draktaris,” I greeted.

“If you don’t mind, could I borrow Father Lee Ki-Young for a moment?” Draktaris asked.

“I was actually going to let him go since so many people are watching,” Lady Deliha replied.

“*Hahahaha*,” Draktaris laughed.

They sure look happy.

“I hope we didn’t put you in a difficult situation, Father,” Lady Deliha said.

“That’s…”

“That’s a mean joke, Lady Deliha. *Hahahaha*. His face turned red as a tomato.” Sir Clarkin pointed out.

“Oh no,” Lady Deliha exclaimed.

“*Hahahahaha!*”

They were having fun amongst themselves while I was feeling upset, but I couldn’t show that. I had yet to make any noticeable achievements, but this build up was important. It wasn't like I wasted the day playing with Metel.

‘By tomorrow, I should be able to talk about the Templars.’

I needed to bring it up in a way that wouldn't be too sudden and random. It seemed like Draktaris was working in the dark, but I needed to…

‘Divide the group.’

Honestly, I had yet to come to a proper conclusion—no, I actually came to a conclusion, but the problem was that I wasn't sure about it.

‘I’m not Altanus.’

There was no way, but it was actually possible.

After entering the iron maiden, it was possible that I assembled the present and the future in a way that would fit the current timeline.

It was possible that I watched Kim Hyun-Sung in his first life… created my avatar… made him act as the masked hero in the first life, and destroyed myself after turning Kim Hyun-Sung into a regressor.

What if it was my plan to send Benigoa to stand in my place, send my shell to the earth, and start the second life?

If I were to assume that I simply couldn't remember those events rather than the possibility that I was not involved at all, then the theory that I was Altanus would be correct.

I couldn't stop thinking about the masked hero, the Lee Ki-Young I had seen in the first life, and the fragments of the past that could be interpreted as the remnants of extinction.

Of course, there were details I needed to organize, including the fact that my memories of Earth hadn't disappeared at all.

'Is that even possible? Can I even do something like that myself?'

Benigoa couldn't remember anything.

'What if Benigoa didn't want to remember rather than she couldn't remember at all? What if she could seal away her own memories like me? What if there was some kind of deal during the process of me becoming Altanus and bringing her up with me?'

There was a slim possibility, but that was all there was to it.

'It's just an assumption.'

There were two main reasons why I came up with that assumption.

First of all, I wouldn't place an avatar called the Masked Hero of the First Life.

'That's just impossible.'

A ton of holy power was required when descending or sending a divine message, so

it was impossible to place an avatar and control it from the beginning till the end. Well, it was technically possible, but the amount of holy power needed to do that made it practically impossible.

The first life was going to be destroyed anyway, so I could have used a bit more holy power to open Hell's gate, but I wasn't sure whether that was even possible.

I could've imbued the personality of the dummy into a homunculus, but that was also out of the question. The illusion and memories I felt were too vivid to say that I simply inherited the memories of a dummy.

Secondly, it would be more convincing to say that Benigoa was Altanus rather than say that I was Altanus.

The Altanus theory was something I came up with to support my assumption.

Between a mere suggestion and something obvious, there wouldn't be any need to compare the two, as the obvious one would be closer to the answer. Based on all the pieces of evidence so far, my second assumption seemed closer to the answer.

Personally, it sounded more convincing.

'That has to be it. There are no other variables here. That has to be it.'

This was where things got complicated.

I reached one conclusion based on the puzzle pieces I forcefully put together to complete the puzzle.

'There's no way Lee Ki-Young is Altanus.'

However…

"…"

"…"

[Lee Ki-Young can become Altanus.]

I could change the past, present, and future.

If I managed to enter the iron maiden faster than Benigoa, then I'd become Altanus.

Not only would I take Benigoa's place, but I could take care of everything she couldn't handle. I could enter the iron maiden and assemble the future the way I wanted it.

Obviously, it was going to be risky. As I mentioned earlier, there was a high chance that I wouldn't be able to create Lee Ki-Young. The first life could end without Jung Ha-Yan, Kim Hyun-Sung, Park Deok-Gu, and Lee Ji-Hye meeting the masked hero.

'That's not all.'

I could also fail in placing my shell to the ground upon sacrificing myself and turning Kim Hyun-Sung into a regressor. If I ended up failing, then Lee Ki-Young would cease to exist.

'Still... '

Despite that, I could assemble the future the way I wanted it.

'Even if the second life begins as a failure, Lee Ki-Young is the only victim. He's the only one who will cease to exist.'

I could clear the Continental War, the 27th Legion, the summoning incident, the War On the Outer Gods, and every other major quest beforehand.

The masked hero wouldn't appear as well.

Before the world was changed, Lee Ki-Young was an incompetent individual, but in the brand-new world, Lee Ki-Young would be an almighty god. It was an arrangement necessary to handle all the events that would occur from the beginning till the end. Of course, that included unknown variables that would certainly appear.

'That's a piece of cake.'

I wasn't sure whether it was actually possible or not, but if I were to summon the guild member of the Blue Guild back to the sanctuary after the end of the War On the Outer Gods War, they would be able to save me from the iron maiden.

The only problem was that they would have no memories of me.

Once the butterfly effect started, the second life would start without Lee Ki-Young, and everyone wouldn't know me. In addition, they could change into strangers. Their personality could change, and they could have different habits as well.

The outcome would be the same, but the life they lived would be completely different.

'That can't be.'

There was no need for me to go *that* far.

There was no reason for me to become Altanus in exchange for everyone forgetting about me.

"This way, Father… There's someone I would like to introduce you to," Draktaris said.

"Okay."

When I saw a figure walking toward us, I couldn't help but recall the grotesque scene I had seen before coming here.

I saw the pig with wounds all over him, Jung Ha-Yan's hair was completely white, and Han Sora looked like a porcupine.

Sun Hee-Young, Elena, and Hwang Jung-Yeon had died instantly.

Ahn Ki-Mo and Yoo Ah-Young managed to hold out for a long time, but they eventually were killed.

I couldn't even find the corpses of Kim Ye-Ri, Lee Chang-Ryeol, and Park Lian.

Kim Hyun-Sung had perished as well with his wings torn off.

"…"

"…"

I realized that I was here to change the future that was already set in stone.

"Hello, Father Lee Ki-Young. I heard many things about you. This is Templar Simon

and I’m…”

“…”

“I’m… Templar Bahamut,” he introduced.

I was sure that the one who made that future was the bastard in front of me.

“…”

“…”

I could sense it instinctively.

CHAPTER 976
ALTANUS (13)

I knew it without even using Mind's Eye.

'He's a villain. I can smell it.'

The psychopathic murderer Jung Jin-Ho, second-rate old codger Lee Seol-Ho, Demon Worshiper Ito Sota, Demon Summoner Jin Cheong, Leader of the 27th Legion, Belial, Seraphim Alter, whom I could tear to pieces but still wouldn't be satisfied, and the scummy Song Soo-Kyung who wasn't even worth mentioning here…

I had encountered so many villains that I had basically developed a villain detector, which allowed me to determine whether someone was a villain or not just by their looks.

'He looks like a villain.'

Actually, Templar Bahamut looked normal.

He wasn't as good-looking as Kim Hyun-Sung, but he was pretty good-looking.

I sized him up and took note of his reddish hair, which wasn't as red as Cha Hee-Ra's hair. Actually, I wasn't sure whether it was bright brown or some type of red, but he had his hair down, reminding me of Jesus' hairstyle.

His large frame was what caught my attention the most. He was massive and was covered with muscles all over. Unlike Park Deok-Gu, who had obtained his muscles by virtue of harsh training, it seemed like he was born with that kind of body.

'I think he's over a hundred and ninety centimeters?'

If I were to exaggerate a bit, he'd be like a legendary demi-god. His arms looked like they were on the verge of exploding from the bulging muscles told me that he was a character whose main stat was Strength.

‘That hand would send hundreds—no, thousands of people to Lucifer’s side with just one slap. This bastard… ’

Basically, he was the Kim Hyun-Sung of this era.

He was the hero of the continent and the hero unfortunate enough to get lost in history.

Mind's Eye was telling me that he was a hero based on his stats and abilities. His job, overwhelming stats, special abilities, unique abilities, equipment, and title were all top tier.

The only difference between him and Kim Hyun-Sung was that his main stat was Strength, while Kim Hyun-Sung's main stat was Agility. Of course, he wouldn't be able to compare to Kim Hyun-Sung with his current stats, so it wasn’t worth comparing the two.

‘You have no idea how hard I worked to strengthen him.’

From Zero Hyun-Sung, First Life Kim Hyun-Sung, Second Life Kim Hyun-Sung, Doom Hyun-Sung, Doom Doom Hyung-Sung, Disconnected Hyun-Sung, to Sunset Hyun-Sung… I worked so hard to strengthen him.

Even if Templar Bahamut was a hero, he couldn’t be compared to Seven-Star Kim Hyun-Sung, who had been strengthened to the max, but if I had to compare him to Kim Hyun-Sung, then I would say…

‘I think he’s on the same level as Doom Hyun-Sung… Actually, maybe Doom Doom Hyun-Sung.’

“Hello, I’m Lee Ki-Young. It’s an honor to meet you, Father Bahamut,” I introduced myself.

“I finally got to meet you. If possible, I’d like to speak with you somewhere more private, but…”

“…”

‘This crazy villainous bastard.’

Doom Doom Hyun-Sung was sadly defeated by Seraphim Alter, whom I really wanted to rip to shreds, but it was only because Seraphim Alter was Doom Doom Hyun-Sung's direct counter.

It was evidenced by how Thronus—who was on the same level as Seraphim Alter but with different abilities—couldn't handle Kim Hyun-Sung's power at the time.

When it came to stats alone, Seraphim Alter couldn't compare to Kim Hyun-Sung at all

I was at a loss for words because the guy before me was on *that* level.

The powers bestowed upon him by Saint Altanus were mere side effects for him.

'He's human… right?'

Could a mere human actually become this strong?

Yes, it was possible. Otherwise, that certain someone wouldn't exist.

'Hee-Ra noona.'

Cha Hee-Ra noona was born to be strong, and he was born to climb to the top and crush those beneath them.

There were people like Cha Hee-Ra, and of course, there were other types of people, but I believed Templar Bahamut was the same type of person as Cha Hee-Ra.

If I had to describe him, it was like he took Kim Hyun-Sung and Cha Hee-Ra's good qualities for himself. I was sure he wasn't the type to go berserk like Hee-Ra noona, as he wasn't the type of person who would allow his instincts to control him.

Swordsman-related information was written in his title and traits, so I could tell that he wasn't like Hee-Ra noona, who was capable of leveling up just by breathing.

He wasn't the type of person to neglect his training. He was always trying to improve himself, and he always wanted to become even stronger. I was sure he was the one who wrote the Templar Training Experiment Report.

In his eyes, time was a weapon. What if this villain actually had eternal life?

‘You horrendous monster.’

He'd be a monster akin to a natural disaster.

Templar Bahamut had such a powerful aura that I didn’t even notice Templar Simon, who was looking all serious as if he were the second-in-command. I unknowingly wanted to rely on him. If he had fallen into the tutorial dungeon with me, I would have bought his coin.

‘He’s nothing but a villain now, though.’

My holy soul quivered beneath his villainous stench.

“Unfortunately, I couldn’t find the opportunity. Father Draktaris really wanted to keep you hidden… I’m glad we managed to meet somehow,” Templar Bahamut said.

'That’s right.'

‘You guys are political enemies, after all.’

“It’s because I’ve been too busy…” I said.

“I’m not criticizing you. It was simply a joke about how much I wanted to meet you… I’m sorry if I burdened you with it,” Templar Bahamut apologized.

“…”

“I heard about the miracle that happened in the prayer room. Of course, there are other things I’m personally curious about besides that. I heard you were a wandering priest in the Land of Nejesca,” Templar Bahamut said.

“Yes, Father Bahamut. It was nothing special, but I was active in the conflict zone between the empires,” I answered.

“I was also active in the Land of Nejesca, but they were in war during that time. *Ah*, I protected the civilians during that time…” Templar Bahamut informed.

“I see.”

I needed to smile for now because he was being friendly toward me as well.

“It’s rare for Templars to be dispatched to the ground level… but at the time, the Land of Nejesca needed help. I’ve always been bothered by the fact that I couldn’t see it to the end, but I finally have the chance to do that. If you don’t mind… is it okay if we talk for a moment?” Templar Bahamut asked.

“Of course, Father Bahamut,” I answered with a smile.

‘He’s good at talking and has good manners.’

I knew he wasn’t the type to just swing his sword, but he was a lot more skilled than I thought.

He found a common topic about the Land of Nejesca, and we naturally changed to topics I was comfortable talking about. He looked really friendly. I wasn’t sure whether he was acting or not, but I could see his desire to get to know the Priest of Miracles and Divine Messages.

I had no idea whether this was his real personality or not. I couldn't help but think that perhaps he was hiding his true colors, but there was a chance that he simply held no malicious intent toward me.

Time and the environment could change people, and he could be *that* kind of person, too.

“Are you… okay with that, Father Draktaris?” Templar Bahamut asked.

“That’s up to Father Lee Ki-Young. It’s not something you should be asking me, Templar Bahamut,” Draktaris answered.

“In that case, we’ll just talk for a bit,” I told him.

“As you wish.”

We started walking away. When I saw that we were heading toward the balcony, it became clear to me that he really didn't want to get interrupted. I felt the wind blowing across my face, and the noises and music slowly disappeared.

“So… what’s Nejesca… like now?” Templar Bahamut asked.

“Honestly, I can’t say that the situation has improved… but the denizens are really

determined to overcome it. It's not because of the wandering priests; they're the ones helping each other out. I can feel their determination to get through these difficult times," I replied.

"…"

"I can't explain everything that's happening there, but I remember the village I stayed at was like that. The other wandering priests I met from time to time—"

"Can you tell me where the village was located?" Templar Bahamut interrupted.

'You won't know even if I tell you.'

'I probably can't tell him that.'

"I remember it being near a small city named Arpe, Templar Bahamut," I answered.

"Arpe…" Templar Bahamut repeated.

"Is that the region you were active in?" I asked.

"No, Father. The region I worked in was closer to the frontline… I did pass by it once, though. I remember… the fountain located in the center of the city was beautiful, and the inn I stayed in was quite impressive," Templar Bahamut answered.

"…"

"I don't really know what happened now… but you must know better than me," Templar Bahamut said.

'He's trying to sound me out.'

It was understandable, as I was basically just a random wandering priest.

A random wandering priest had suddenly become the center of attention at an important social gathering, and I even received a divine message. Actually, it wasn't that strange for a priest to receive a Divine Message, but Templar Genny made him feel doubtful.

I was sure the Templars had asked about what had happened in the prayer room.

However, Templar Genny, who had sworn on Lady's Lucifer name, remained quiet, so they became suspicious of it. To make matters worse, I was one of Draktaris' people. If the Templars had done all sorts of background checks on me, it wouldn't be strange if they became even more suspicious of me.

It was hard to uncover the identity of a wandering priest, but…

'I'm sure they couldn't find anything about me.'

I felt like they'd start looking into how I had gotten the invitation in the first place.

"It will look different from before," I informed him.

"…"

"Arpe is still a beautiful place though, Templar Bahamut," I added.

I had never been to Arpe, but I *did* study the Land of Nejesca to the point that I felt sick just hearing its name alone. I knew about the fountain he had mentioned, and if I were to exaggerate a bit, I probably knew that place more than the denizens there.

Still, it was better to be vague about my answers.

'He's being cautious as well.'

If he had been more direct or had tried a stupid method to sound me out, I would have lied.

However, if I said, "Yes, that lake is very beautiful," then he'd definitely say, "There's no lake in Arpe," and he'd change his attitude toward me.

I was sure that he wasn't a hundred percent suspicious of me.

There were too many people who had witnessed the miracle in the prayer room for him to say that Father Draktaris was lying. I was sure the news had already spread like wildfire, and he couldn't treat me rudely after hearing the witness testimonies.

"About the people there, what do you think of them?" Templar Bahamut asked.

"…"

I thought it'd be best for me to take the initiative.

“You seem to be interested in something completely different, Templar Bahamut.”

It was important to let him know that I was not an idiot. He was reasonable for someone as massive as him.

He seemed to value rules and discipline a lot, as he had decided to engage in a political war with Father Draktaris, even though he could easily kill the latter.

“I’m not an idiot, Templar Bahamut. If there’s something you’re really curious about, I want you to be straightforward and ask me about it,” I told him.

“…”

“…” “I’m sorry, Father. That’s not what I meant. I just—”

“What do you want to know?” I interrupted him.

“…”

“…” There was silence. It seemed like he had no idea what to say, but the hesitant man eventually asked, “Who are you?”

“…”

“…” “What kind of person…” I trailed off.

“…”

“Do I look like in your eyes?” I continued.

With that, I spread my wings. There were bright lights, and he looked at me with a dumbfounded gaze. One of my eyes was emitting a radiant golden light as I stared at him. The next moment, everything vanished as if it were just an illusion, and I saw him staring at me while holding his breath.

CHAPTER 977
ALTANUS (14)

I couldn’t just tell Templar Bahamut that I was the God of Sacrifice and Revival, and I obviously couldn’t keep my wings open. It was annoying to keep telling people that I was the incarnation of Lucifer, and more importantly, I didn’t know how he was going to react.

There was no guarantee that he wouldn't go berserk like what Spirit Gelk had done.

It would be enough if he thought that he had just seen an illusion. I just needed him to doubt what he had seen and question whether what he had seen was real or not. It had to be enough to sway him.

‘Even if he doesn't swayed by that… ’

He wouldn't be suspicious of me, at the very least.

It didn’t matter whether he thought of me as a wandering priest with special holy power, a saint who had received the Goddess' blessing, an angel from up above, or Lucifer's messenger. The important part was making him get rid of any negative thoughts about me.

If he had no choice but to doubt me, then I wanted him to doubt me in a positive way.

“What do I look like, Templar Bahamut?” I asked.

“…”

“No matter what you think of me, I’m just an ordinary wandering priest. I’m a believer who serves Lucifer with all my heart. I spread her word, and I live only for her. I understand if you have questions about my past, but…” I trailed off.

“…”

“But my past doesn't matter anymore. I'm nothing more than a priest serving her

wholeheartedly," I said.

'He's still out of it.'

"Just now…" Templar Bahamut mumbled.

"…"

"Just now…" Templar Bahamut repeated.

"Yes?"

"Just now, what…" Templar Bahamut trailed off.

"What are you trying to say?" I asked.

"…"

"…"

He'd be proving that I was an innocent priest by staying quiet.

'I don't know anything, damn it. I don't know what you're saying or what happened just now.'

In the end…

"I-It's nothing, Father. And…" Templar Bahamut trailed off.

"…"

"I'd like to apologize again… for being rude earlier," Templar Bahamut added.

'That's what I want to hear.'

"I accept your apology," I said.

However, it was still awkward. He had clearly made a mistake, and he couldn't stop thinking about the "illusion" he had seen just now, so he couldn't think properly at all.

The situation was now in my control.

“We can now enjoy our time together,” I said.

“What?”

“About the Land of Nejesca and other things,” I told him.

“*Ah*.”

I was suggesting that we go back to what we originally came here to do.

Cornering someone who was still out of it was easy.

There were many things to talk about, such as the Land of Nejesca, Templars, and the topics at the social gathering. I was going to meet a lot more people at the social gathering today, but a huge bait was waiting for me, so I couldn’t let this opportunity pass by.

Even I thought I had the ability to curry favor from other people.

I just needed to play along. It was easy to refrain from talking about things they didn't want to hear and gain their favor by saying things that they wanted to hear, but it wasn’t something everyone was capable of doing.

‘A person like him… ’

I was sure he had heard a lot of flattery before.

The minor incident earlier could actually help me out. He basically owed me a debt.

‘I'm also a guest here, after all.’

“I see. Did that really happen?” Templar Bahamut asked.

“Yes. As you already know, the Land of Nejesca…”

“*Ah.*”

I talked about that place and took a sip of wine in the middle of it.

Of course, we also talked about theology.

He studied theology as a Templar, but he wasn't on the same level as someone like me who had devoted myself to theology.

I was aware of Lucifer's teachings and the knowledge that was scribbled down by renowned theologists was also embedded into my head. I added my own interpretation and made sure that it wouldn't go against Lucifer's teachings. If it wasn't enough, I would make riddles to confuse him.

"I'm sure everything is according to Lady Lucifer's will. The land is green, and the river is dark, after all," I said.

It was so ridiculous that *I* didn't even know what I was saying.

Why would the river be dark when the land was green?

It was nonsense, and it wasn't even convincing to begin with, but we had an in-depth discussion about the holy scripture, so I couldn't help but think that he was making his own interpretation of my words.

I probably looked like a knowledgeable person in his eyes.

"For issues like this, I think we should approach it with joy, reason, and sacredness," I said.

"I'm sorry, Father… but I don't quite understand… Can you tell me more about how I should approach it?" Templar Bahamut asked.

"The act of explaining with detail isn't holy, Templar Bahamut. I believe that's the case for this issue…" I answered.

"…"

I was sure he was getting a headache.

"I'm embarrassed. I also thought I was serving Lady Lucifer sincerely, but…" Templar Bahamut paused.

"We just serve her in different ways. While I couldn't do anything other than read

and pray, you're already serving her as her sword," I said.

I didn't want to give him too much credit, so I only gave him compliments when necessary.

As always, people would always realize something at this point of the conversation.

'He's easier to talk to than I thought.'

It would be great if he realized that, and it would be enough for me right now. After all, we were just getting started. We entered the social gathering hall and talked about many different topics while walking side by side.

Templar Simon and other insignificant people invited to the social gathering had joined the conversation, but Templar Bahamut and I were the last ones to remain and continue the conversation, like those people who'd always stay last in a drinking party.

We told everyone that we were going on a stroll and left the hall. We proceeded to have another deep conversation. He seemed to be thinking that I was easier to talk to than he thought because he talked a lot more than earlier.

I could tell that he liked me.

Perhaps it was because of my wings, but it was an undeniable fact that he was influenced by my personality, which was as radiant as the light.

When we were far enough from the social gathering hall, we continued our conversation. We saw what looked like a training hall in the distance, and it was perfect timing, as it was about time I showed him the human side of the Priest of Divine Message.

"I had the opportunity to learn the sword before," I said.

"…"

"You don't seem to believe me." I pointed out.

"I'm sorry. I just can't imagine it…" Templar Bahamut said.

“That opportunity was back when I was still young… Everyone dreams of being a knight or mercenary when they’re young. During that time, I wasn’t aware of Lady Lucifer’s will, and I had yet to realize my destiny back then.

"I imagined taking down monsters just like the children dreaming of becoming warriors,” I explained.

It wasn’t something I told everyone. I only drank one cup of wine due to the mood, but I had to act like I was getting drunk. That was why I was talking a lot more and was even talking about the past.

I could also be talking more because I felt more comfortable around him than I thought I would.

“I learned it from a swordsman in a small city… It's not impressive, but I was pretty proud of it at the time,” I said.

‘He’s looking at me as if he wants to see my swordsmanship.’

He didn’t say it because he was afraid that it would be rude, but I could see it from his expression. He had his own reasons for seeing it, after all.

“Right now, I'm practicing it to defend myself. As a wandering priest, I do end up in dangerous situations, after all,” I told him.

“I see. If you don’t mind, can you show me your swordsmanship? I want to make up for my rudeness earlier as well…” Templar Bahamut asked.

“I had already accepted your apology earlier, Templar Bahamut,” I reminded him.

“…”

“Still, it’s a good opportunity… so I’ll show you a little bit,” I said.

I held up my sword awkwardly.

‘I wanted to show him the killer techniques I learned from Hyun-Sung, but… ’

I couldn’t leak any information. I learned swordsmanship from Rafael, so I decided to show him what I had learned from Rafael.

This was an event that would show him my human side, and Templar Bahamut needed to see it to obtain decent information about me. I had been dragging him around during our conversation, so it was about time for him to earn something.

This was also a necessary step toward friendship on equal grounds.

"*Whoo…*"

I showed him the basics, and he was watching me with a serious gaze.

My arms were shaking because the sword was heavier than I thought, but it stayed up. I showed him my technique for about thirty minutes.

When I placed my sword down, he nodded quietly and remarked, "You learned a great technique."

'Really?'

"You lack the stamina, but…" Templar Bahamut trailed off, looking like he didn't know what to say. It was like he had a hard time making a comment, and the sight made me feel miserable.

"It's obvious, but when you swing your sword…" Templar Bahamut showed an example.

He looked like he swung his sword lightly, but I actually heard a *whoosh*.

"This technique requires a good balance. It's a sword technique that relies on exaggerated skill and the use of mana. It looks like a simple sword technique, but…"

'He just won't stop talking. He's having fun.'

Templar Bahamut was talking a lot to make up for the time when he was quiet while we were talking about theology.

"I'll help you with your stance," Templar Bahamut offered.

"…"

"Yes, like that…" Templar Bahamut said.

"…"

"You have to put a little more strength into your lower body. Move your arm here… Great, you're doing great," Templar Bahamut said.

'Geez, this is really hard.'

"…"

I felt like a doll because his large hand was moving me around.

Of course, we couldn't spend a lot of time on it because it was already getting late.

Templar Bahamut was satisfied, and I was somewhat satisfied as well. I think he had gotten a little more comfortable after we left the social gathering. Now, it was time to part ways, so I needed to say something before we meet next time.

"I can't see the sky from here," I said.

"That's true," Templar Bahamut said.

"When I was at the Land of Nejesca, I'd always look up at the sky after finishing my work. The stars in the pitch-black sky seemed to take away the exhaustion I had accumulated during the day. Doing that became a habit for me, so I'll unknowingly look up at the sky every day," I told him.

"Since you arrived here…" Templar Bahamut trailed off.

"Yes, I haven't seen the sky since then, but that pitch-black ceiling looks similar to the sky I had seen a long time ago," I said.

I was sure he knew what I was talking about.

"…"

"It's been a really long time since I talked to someone this long… so thank you for spending time with me today, Templar Bahamut," I said.

"I should be the one thanking you, Father," he said.

I rejected Templar Bahamut's offer to take me to my room and started walking away.

Soon, Templar Genny appeared before me and greeted me, but I didn't see his energetic face, and perhaps it was because of my pale face.

"Father?" Templar Genny muttered and checked up on me.

Draktaris, who was standing nearby, did the same. He breathed out in relief upon seeing that I was fine. However, there were tears in his eyes, and he looked like he was out of breath. He was trying to hold back his tears, but he was failing at it.

"What happened? Father Lee Ki-Young… what on earth…"

'You're watching, right? Templar Genny, was he watching? I believe he's going to cut off the arm of one of his seniors.'

"He's… *Haa… haa…* He's…" I panted.

It was time to cause a commotion.

CHAPTER 978
ALTANUS (15)

“Father…” Draktaris mumbled.

“Are you okay, Father? Father,” Templar Genny asked.

My face was filled with many emotions, such as fear, confusion, and horror.

The sight was probably making them imagine many things.

I cried as if someone had turned on the faucet in my eyes, and I was trembling as if I had jumped into the ocean mid-winter. My face was pale, my lips were dry, and I was panicking, making Draktaris and Templar Genny confused about what to do.

They were obviously worried about me. Of course, they were curious as well, as I showed this kind of reaction right after meeting with Father Bahamut.

They were probably thinking about what exactly had happened and why I was reacting this way. By now, I was sure there were several assumptions in their heads.

It was ridiculous how Templar Geny was making a big deal as if this was happening to him. Perhaps my never-ending teardrops of light had made him emotional, or he was probably just worried and sympathizing with my pain.

He was crying as well.

“Father! Father!” Draktaris exclaimed. Unlike the child who couldn’t hide his emotions, he was trying to understand the situation. However, he also seemed afraid of what I was going to say.

“*Haa… haa…”* I took a deep breath, and the two stared nervously at me.

Father Draktaris turned and chased away the people who weren't supposed to be here.

“Father Draktaris.”

“Not now, and don’t ask what happened today,” Draktaris ordered.

“Yes, sir.”

“Templar Genny…”

“I-I…”

He even gave Templar Genny a few orders. The shocked boy bit his lips as if he wanted to stay with me, but the young Templar couldn’t rebel against Father Draktaris.

To make things worse, the key figures who were still here were giving him signs, so I was sure that even he himself thought that he wasn't supposed to be here. However, that was his problem.

He also had the right to stay and hear me out.

I grabbed his sleeve as if I needed someone to lean on, and he nodded with a serious face. My action seemed to have given him courage. He looked as if he knew that I needed him and that it was his job to protect me.

“It’s okay, Father. Everything is going to be okay,” Templar Genny reassured.

“…”

“I’ll stay by your side. It’s okay. It’ll be fine,” Templar Genny added.

‘What’s going to be okay? What’s this got to do with you… It doesn’t matter if you’re beside me or not, man. He’s pretty stupid as well. Perhaps he was born stupid.’

However, his comforting words seemed to be effective, as the young Templar became the sanctuary of the Priest of Divine Message.

I managed to come back to my senses.

“Father Lee Ki-Young…” Draktaris muttered.

“I’m sorry for showing such a disgraceful side of me, Father Draktaris. And to the others as well,” I said.

“If it’s too difficult to say, you don’t have to say it, Father,” Templar Genny said.

‘What’s difficult to say? I’m going to tell you no matter what. Learn to read the room, Genny.’

I thought it would be best to set the mood first. I nodded with a firm face, looking like I had made a decision. Then, I looked up at them as if I was ready to let them know the secret that I had been hiding for a while now.

‘Confidently and proudly.’

“I don’t know how to tell you this, but…” I mumbled.

“…”

“Sometimes… I see strange scenes,” I said.

“…”

I decided to talk a bit about it.

“One of my eyes will sometimes see a different place,” I said.

They revealed solemn looks at my revelation.

It wasn’t something they could just ignore.

If some beggar said such words, they’d tell them to go to a mental hospital or something, but I wasn’t some ordinary priest. I received a divine message from Lucifer just a few days ago. I received information about Saint Altanus’ downfall directly from her.

The miraculous things happening to me were things that they couldn't just overlook.

“Was it after… you received the divine message?” Draktaris asked.

I nodded.

“O Lucifer!”

“…”

“O Lucifer…”

“You're probably thinking that Lady Lucifer is trying to communicate something through me… but I’m not sure whether this really is a miracle… or… I’m…” I trailed off.

'Going crazy… '

“I don’t even know whether my assumptions are correct or not, so I’m really worried,” I said.

“Father Lee Ki-Young… I understand that you’re scared, but this… I’m sure it’s a blessing. I’m sure there’s a reason why Lady Lucifer had chosen you,” Draktaris said.

Draktaris looked like he was trying his best to hide his smile. He seemed to be comforting me, as I was confused, but I was sure that this development was good for his people.

This was indeed a "blessing" for him. We didn't even have to talk about the legitimacy of my words. However, Draktaris' expression didn't last long, and the room soon became quiet.

It was probably because they finally understood why I was so cautious and afraid.

Templar Genny looked at me and muttered, “You… saw something… related to Templar Bahamut…”

They understood the storyline. They were really good at figuring out the story.

I had to start trembling again, but I had already gained some courage earlier. I realized that I could overcome this hardship, as I had people who cared about me.

'Overcome this, Ki-Young. You can do it. The people here will become your strength.'

“Father,” Templar Genny said.

'Yeah, thanks for giving me courage. Thanks to you, I'm able to take one step forward.'

"Father Lee Ki-Young…" Father Draktaris said.

'Same goes for your Draktaris… '

"Templar Bahamut…" I paused.

"…"

"I… saw him worshiping an evil god," I confessed.

"…"

"I saw him sacrificing something inside an iron maiden, and he was bowing toward this evil god. I saw a river of blood at his feet, along with a mountain of corpses. Those who are still alive are screaming for help. Many died while screaming out Lady Lucifer's name. It was such a horrible sight that I couldn't… look at it properly," I explained.

"*Ah…*"

"I don't know the exact timeframe… or why it happened. I don't even know if what I had seen will happen in the distant future… but as Father Draktaris said, I felt like I had received some kind of message," I added.

"…"

"I must have seen…" I trailed off. "the downfall of Saint Altanus… and… Templar Bahamut."

"…"

They were decent puzzle pieces that I had yet to put together.

"The first divine message was clearly about the saint losing her holy power," I said.

"…"

"And the second…"

It felt like I was *really* cornering him, so I thought it'd be best if I denied it at least once.

“I can't imagine Templar Bahamut betraying Lady Lucifer. The Templar Bahamut that I know looked like someone who respected Lady Lucifer and Saint Altanus more than anyone else. I’m sure there’s a reason behind it… perhaps there's something I haven't seen yet," I said.

I saw it clearly with my own two eyes, but we still needed more information.

Moreover, the narrative that would piece the puzzle pieces together was still missing.

“If his plan has always been to betray Lady Lucifer, then…”

I was sure Draktaris wanted to believe that.

“This isn’t going to be easy,” Draktaris said.

'Yeah, it won’t be easy.'

I was no longer at the center of attention. The worried Draktaris and his minions were talking seriously among themselves.

“What do we do?” Draktaris asked.

“He has many followers in the Underground Temple, Father Draktaris. We must gather those people, restrain them, and plan for the future,” one of his minions suggested.

“This is an urgent situation, so we must prepare for the future. He’s a threat to the Underground Temple–-no, the continent,” they said.

“How about we summon the Heretic Inquisitors? If what Father Lee Ki-Young said is true, then I’m sure we can find evidence,” another suggested.

“If we don’t find anything, we're going to be in a difficult situation, and we're talking about Bahamut here. If he sees that we’re on the move, he might try to rally the others. No, if he reveals his true intentions before that happens…”

“*Ha…* evil god… evil god… O Lucifer!” Draktaris exclaimed.

“What about assassins or mercenaries aboveground?”

“We can’t ask them to come down to the Underground Temple,” Draktaris replied.

“If I may speak… shouldn’t we wait and see whether what Father Lee Ki-Young had seen was truly Lady Lucifer’s prophecy?”

“Watch what you say! How dare you speak such nonsense?!” Draktaris roared.

“We must be certain, Father Draktaris. Once we start moving, we won't be able to stop. A war might erupt in the Underground Temple. We must be really careful about this,” said one of Draktaris' minions.

These bastards were not as courageous as I thought. If Father Basel were here, he’d yell at someone, ordering them to bring over his mace, and then he'd charge at those daring enough to oppose him while cursing at them.

However, I understood why they were being so cautious.

‘I’d be in a difficult situation as well if a war were to break out here.’

The people who were here right now and those who'd stand with them would be wary of the Templars. If they were to bring the Heretic Inquisitors or whatever here, things would definitely backfire, and they'd lose their lives.

I hated it whenever people were questioning me, but it was inevitable for some people to refuse to accept me as the Priest of Divine Message or prophecy.

I acted like I was having a headache, and Templar Genny called out to me. “Father.”

He looked more worried than before.

“Father?” Templar Genny repeated.

When he called out, I saw the others having a discussion.

“Father, right now…”

“*Huh…”*

“This is…”

Draktaris’ "family" and Templar Genny were unwittingly transfixed on one of my eyes because it was emitting a radiant golden light. The priests felt the holy power of my golden eye, and they all knelt one by one.

“Priest of Prophecy…”

“Priest of Prophecy…”

“O Lucifer!”

“*Ahh!*”

“*Ahhh!*”

They cast stupefied gazes on me. I looked up blankly as if I couldn't see the priests kneeling before me. I didn’t say anything about what I had seen just now.

After they all left, however, I walked up to Templar Genny and whispered, “Templar Genny."

“Yes, Father,” Templar Genny answered.

“I’m not someone special,” I said.

“That’s not true, Father. You’re a special person,” Templar Genny said, refuting my words.

“No, I’m not, Templar Genny. So… you don’t… have to put your life on the line for me. Remember this. You don’t need to throw your life for me,” I told him.

“…”

“Keep that in mind,” I said.”

“…” “Don’t die for me,” I added.

I only managed to make this honest statement because I truly cared about him.

However, he was still going to die for me one way or another.

“Don’t try to save me,” I told him.

CHAPTER 979
ALTANUS (16)

It was too early to decide which route to take.

I had yet to come up with a plan of what I had to do if things went wrong once I had become Altanus. It would be better to discuss the best next course of action once it was over.

Plan B was the safer route, but if ended up in the worst-case scenario, I would have to consider Plan A. Right now, the most reasonable thing for me to do was to make my move while considering both routes at the same time.

That was exactly the reason I decided to plant a seed in Templar Genny.

'Whether it's Genny or Gen, he'll be my shield at least once.'

If I were to go with Plan A, it'd be Genny. If I were to go with Plan B, it'd be Gen.

Actually, even if the future ended up changing, I could still create a scene where Templar Gen would have to make a noble sacrifice in Kim Hyun-Sung's place.

'It'll be the same for Draktaris.'

I had an idea about how to do that. I just had to lay the foundation that would turn him into my collaborator, deepen the conflict between Bahamut and Draktaris, and transform Draktaris into an NPC who would help against the final boss.

'This could be the reason why I haven't heard any news about defeating Draktaris.'

Hee-Ra noona probably found this boring, but those who had entered the prayer room could have noticed that the raid condition had changed.

Regardless, the main force seemed to have decided to continue with the raid, so I could assume that they were not in a dangerous situation. Regardless of what plan I ended up choosing, Draktaris could still become an allied NPC.

The key to these two routes was Templar Bahamut.

'Weakening their forces is the first thing to do.'

It would be better if we could get rid of them…

'But it's too risky.'

He was the hero of this world, after all.

The continent had to meet its end after Benigoa or I had entered the iron maiden, but it would only happen when Lucifer was finally ready to abandon the continent.

If the continent were to meet its end in a different way, the future would definitely change into something unfamiliar to me. Templar Genny was a shield. A shield that'd protect the continent until Benigoa or I had inherited the continent.

Moreover, I could easily kill him if I wanted to do so.

"Father, how about reconsidering it?" Draktaris suggested.

"It's fine, Father Draktaris," I replied.

"…"

"Lady Lucifer wants it. I-I don't know whether what I had seen was the future that is about to begin or not, but as you and the others had said, I don't think I'm worthy of the title, 'Priest of Prophecy… '" I paused.

"…"

"But if Lady Lucifer had truly bestowed upon you that ability, there had to be a reason behind it. I might be able to figure out the reasons behind Templar Bahamut's downfall, and I might be able to stop it as well. I need to become close to him.

"I-It hasn't been that long since we met, but… I don't think he'll abandon Lady Lucifer," I added.

"…"

“I know what you’re worried about, Father Draktaris. I agree that there might be a safer and more reasonable method than this… but I believe that this is the only thing that I can do,” I told him.

“Father…”

“Even if he's going to abandon Lady Lucifer—”

“How about at least taking Templar Genny or the other guards with you?” Draktaris suggested.

It wasn’t a bad idea, but I shook my head. I didn't want him to put his guard back up.

“F-Father Lee Ki-Young, Father Draktaris is right. As you said, it’ll be nice if nothing happens, b-but you might end up in a dangerous situation…” Templar Genny chimed in.

“I’m just going to spend some time with him, Templar Genny,” I reassured him.

“…”

“I won’t do anything that’ll worry you, so you don’t have to worry,” I added.

“But Father!”

“As I told you yesterday… I’m not someone special. Please keep that in mind, Templar Genny,” I reminded him.

I stepped back slowly.

Templar Genny frowned as if he were looking at someone who was being sold off, but the Priest of Prophecy would never avoid his fate.

I was scared, but I knew that the bigger picture was more important than me.

I smiled brightly, trying to tell him that it wasn't a big deal.

I used that same bright smile to greet the guest who had been waiting for me.

“Templar Bahamut!” I greeted in an energetic voice.

Templar Bahamut wasn't the type of person to enjoy a social gathering, so he wouldn’t have attended the third day of this social gathering if it hadn't been for me.

It seemed that he had truly enjoyed our time together yesterday.

‘I’m sure he enjoyed it.’

The Underground Temple had no concept of recreation, and the Goddess' Hand Mirror had yet to exist, so I was sure Templar Bahamut's daily life was boring. Moreover, he was always in the company of the same priests.

He had just met someone easy to talk to, so I was sure he was excited to spend some more time with that individual—an outsider who cared about no one else but Lucifer.

“You’re here,” Bahamut greeted.

“I saw you from back there, Templar Bahamut…” I said.

“*Hahaha…”* Templar Bahamut chuckled sheepishly. It was a short conversation, but the atmosphere was clearly better than yesterday. His sword training class had helped us build a bond, and our interaction was so natural that there was no awkwardness.

‘People are normally awkward around each other the day after having a few drinks with each other.’

It could be said that we were already past that point.

“Father Draktaris.”

“Templar Bahamut.”

The two pillars of the Underground Temple looked at each other. At this rate, things were going to get awkward, so I had to get in between the two.

“I’ll go spend some time with Templar Bahamut, Father Draktaris,” I said.

“Understood, Father Lee Ki-Young,” Draktaris answered.

I had a lot to do at the social gathering, but there were things I needed to prioritize. I had already informed Metel of the things she needed to do and the people she needed to meet.

I saw her with so many people around her, so she was definitely doing a great job.

'Draktaris will start making his move as well.'

He was gathering his people and planning for the future.

Rather than staying with Draktaris, it was more helpful to disappear quietly because I needed to gain the Mage Marquis and the Grand Duchess' favor. Of course, it'd be kind of strange if I suddenly suggested that we head out, so it was better to wait for the right timing while talking to other people.

"*Hahahaha!*"

The place was filled with laughter today as well.

"So that's the hidden meaning behind Lady Lucifer's words. That's amazing, Father Lee Ki-Young."

"It's just my own interpretation. How could my words replace her words?" I said.

"You don't have to be so modest, *hahaha*. You said it was your own interpretation. In that case… Mr. Bahamut… can I ask what you think about this?"

"Before hearing Father Lee Ki-Young's words, I also understood her words as it is… but after hearing his words, I believe there's a hidden meaning as well," Bahamut answered.

"Your knowledge is pretty impressive. Now that I think about it when you arrived here…"

'The rumors reached that far already?'

"I heard from somewhere that you spent quite some time in the library."

"I wanted to see what the Underground Temple's library looked like…" I told them.

"*Hahahaha.*"

Of course, my goal today wasn't to entertain the people here. Although I was laughing with them, I needed to show that I was uncomfortable. To others, I seemed like the same old Lee Ki-Young, but Bahamut looked uncomfortable upon seeing me. His genuine smile from yesterday was nowhere to be seen.

He kept looking around as if there was something he wanted to say to me, and he looked like he wanted to leave this place.

"Are you okay, Father?" Templar Bahamut asked.

"Yes, I'm fine," I answered.

Of course, I showed him that I wasn't actually fine.

"How about we go get some fresh air?" Templar Bahamut suggested.

I nodded as if I had been waiting for him to say that.

"You looked really uncomfortable earlier." Templar Bahamut pointed out.

"What?"

"Yes, earlier…"

"That can't be…" I said.

"I could have been imagining things… but that was how I felt. It's like you're worried about something…" Templar Bahamut said.

"…"

Naturally, I didn't say anything for a while because I needed to think about what I wanted to say. As always, I revealed a worried face and muttered, "Well…"

"…"

"I… don't know how to tell you this, but…" I trailed off.

"…"

"Sometimes… I see strange scenes," I continued.

"…"

It was the same as yesterday.

"One of my eyes will sometimes see a different place. It sounds crazy, but after receiving Lady Lucifer's divine message, I have been seeing strange things—things that will happen in the future."

I don't know whether they'll happen in the near or distant future, but they are things that are bound to happen, and I saw them as if they were illusions," I explained.

It was a secret that I had been keeping to myself. I hadn't told anyone about this except for him. It was a stupid thing to do, and it was clearly strange to tell all of this to someone I had just met yesterday, but I had no one else to rely on because I was alone down here.

Upon hearing my struggles, my new friend Bahamut stared quietly at me.

"I'm sorry. I know that it doesn't make sense," I said. "…"

"*Ha… haha*… Actually, it was a joke, Mr. Bahamut. My joke must've been a bit—"

"I believe you." Templar Bahamut interrupted me.

"You do?" I asked.

"I *think* I can believe you," Templar Bahamut said, nodding.

'Yeah, I knew you'd believe me.'

Since he had witnessed an illusion as well.

He had witnessed the priest from aboveground spreading his wings and showing off his golden eye. He also saw an indescribable holy light spreading from the priest's figure.

Who would believe me if not him?

“Really?” I asked.

“Yes, I believe you, Father,” Templar Bahamut replied.

Perhaps it was because I was no longer feeling nervous, but my legs quivered, and I felt as if they'd give up at any moment now. Tears welled up in my eyes as if they were representing the hardships I had endured so far.

“If you don’t mind, can you tell me what you saw?” Templar Bahamut asked.

“That’s…”

“You don’t have to tell me if you don’t feel comfortable,” Templar Bahamut added.

“Well…” I trailed off.

“Yes?”

“It’s nothing, Mr. Bahamut,” I said.

“…”

“I can’t tell you right now…” I told him.

“…”

“But you must stay away from power,” I warned him.

boom!

There was an explosion as soon as my words fell, and the explosion enveloped me.

However, I wasn’t worried because Templar Bahamut was here to protect me. The explosion created flames similar to flames that one could only find in hell. It was a pitch-black fire that gave off an ominous air.

The nauseating flames looked as if it was going to devour everything in its path.

"*Ah!*"

"Watch out!"

It was…

[Hellfire Bomb Potion - Semi-Mythic]

An item created by an unknown black mage who had been hiding in the underground world all this while.

CHAPTER 980
ALTANUS (17)

'Damn it.'

It was stronger than I thought. It was such a huge explosion that it damaged the inner part of my precious ear, and the flames that spread afterward were on a different level from the fire an ordinary black mage could make.

Actually, I wasn't even sure if a black mage was the one behind this.

Interestingly, the explosion spread out immediately like a wave of darkness and devoured everything. If I were to exaggerate a bit, I'd say that it had a mind of its own.

Before I could even scream, the fire that had its own will struck me like a wave.

'Ah, is this… how… '

Was this the end of the Saint of Sacrifice, who had lived his entire life for the sake of others? Was the light that fought for the greater good going to disappear here like mist?

Fortunately, Bahamut wasn't going to stand by and watch the saint's final moments.

He covered me with his towering frame, and I saw his large arms wrapping around me. My vision went dark, and it was all because Bahamut had blocked the fire by embracing me. I was struggling to breathe; the flames had burned away the oxygen.

The explosion covered a pretty big area, as it wasn't just a simple terrorist attack.

It filled the entire room, and I could hear screams everywhere. To make things worse, the fire had squeezed through the opening in Bahamut's protection and attacked me.

Bahamut had a massive frame, but there was no way he could protect me perfectly.

"*Ack!*"

I forced myself to swallow my screams because I knew that Bahamut was in more pain than me.

"*Ugh…*"

Despite that, I couldn't stop myself from groaning.

Kaboom!

I heard something fall, and I assumed that the ceiling was collapsing.

Afterward, I heard a high-pitched noise, and then…

"…!"

"…!"

The surroundings seemed to move backward as if everything was a tape that had been rewound.

"*Ah…*"

I saw a horrible sight before me.

The Underground Temple, which had managed to maintain its long history, culture, and knowledge, was completely destroyed.

Lady Lucifer's holy temple was destroyed as well.

It was fortunate that the explosion had occurred far from the social gathering hall.

However, it seemed like the pitch-black fire wasn't going to go out anytime soon. To make matters worse, it was spreading while devouring everything in its path as if it were a demon.

"Mr. Bahamut? Are you okay? Mr. Bahamut!" I shouted. I was worried about the person who had decided to protect me rather than my surroundings.

"…"

"…"

"Are you hurt anywhere, Mr. Bahamut?" I asked.

He wasn't badly hurt. I wanted him to have burn scars, but his Endurance was pretty high, so I wasn't expecting any of that. He could have internal injuries, so I became hopeful and examined him.

Unfortunately, it didn't seem to be the case.

'Still, I'm sure it was painful; he's just pretending that he's not in pain.'

He'd look bad if he were to make a fuss about pain.

Regardless, I had to act like I was worried about him by exaggerating more than him and asking anxiously whether he was okay or not.

Of course, it would be more effective if I was hurt because I could pretend like I was worried about him without realizing my own injuries.

There was already a scar on one of my arms.

The fire had enveloped him, so there could be burn scars like this all over him. At a glance, the injury looked excruciatingly painful, but I only cared about Bahamut right now.

I could see some burn marks on him, so I mobilized my holy power.

"O-Oh no…" I said shockingly.

It wasn't an ordinary burn injury, and it had to be purified as soon as possible. I was afraid that the flames had a horrifying side-effect similar to a plague. More importantly, I needed him to be aware of the work that I was putting in.

"Father…" Bahamut mumbled.

"Are you okay, Mr. Bahamut? If you wait a moment, I'll…" I paused.

"…"

"I have to purify…"

"Father!" Bahamut shouted.

I finally realized that one of my arms was injured.

"*Ah…*"

'Wow, I'm just too nice, but that pain isn't as important as Baha-whatever's injury.'

My voice shook as I replied, "I-I'm okay. More importantly—"

"You have to get it treated right now," Bahamut interrupted me.

"What? B-But…"

"Please hold on a little longer. I think it's best to patch you up first," Bahamut suggested.

"Okay…"

'At least he knows how to treat wounds.'

"…"

"Your arm," Bahamut requested.

"Okay."

Once he was done patching me up, we left in a hurry.

There were some difficulties due to the debris from the explosion, but Bahamut shoved them away with his large frame. The pitch-black flames on the debris were clearly after the Priest of Prophecy.

After putting out the fire that was reaching out toward me, Bahamut said, "It's still dangerous."

He was right. It was still dangerous here, and he was probably worried about another round of terrorist attacks. He was calm—no, it was like he was trying his best to remain calm.

“It wasn’t an ordinary flame. Hellish flames… that’s darker… than the abyss…” I muttered with an edgy tone of voice.

“…”

“How could something like this happen in the Underground Temple… The others… Do you think the people at the social gathering hall are safe?” I asked.

“I’m not certain. I hope I’m wrong, and I’m sure you felt it as well… but there aren’t a lot of demons capable of wielding this kind of fire. There's probably a black mage who had made a contract with the priest of Rembil. I don’t know how they entered the Underground Temple—”

“No,” I interrupted him.

“…”

“T-This… isn’t the work of Rembil's priest. We’ll have to wait and see, but…” I trailed off.

“…”

“The black mage who has made a contract with a demon lord,” I continued.

I suspected this to be the work of a black mage who had made a contract with a demon lord or a squadron leader in a legion. The hellish flame looked so ominous for it to be a simple terrorist attack.

The shocking truth was finally revealed, and it was someone I could have never imagined.

“*Blech…”* I started retching.

“Are you okay?” Bahamut asked.

“The stench…” I said.

“What?”

“The stench of the pitch-black fire…” I clarified.

It was a nauseating stench that ordinary people couldn’t smell.

Bahamut was confused, but I could smell it. It smelled of pure evil, and it had an ominous power that seemed capable of devouring everything.

It was a deep, dark evil that made me tremble.

“Are you all right?” Bahamut asked.

“I’m not… really sure. Why…”

And that was when I made one of my eyes shine…

“Again…” I mumbled.

'I’ll stumble a bit here.'

Bahamut definitely knew what was going on, as I had told him that I'd sometimes see strange things after receiving Lady Lucifer's divine message. I also told him that perhaps the strange scenes were the future.

Bahamut told me that he believed me, and he had decided to trust my words after I mustered some courage and told him about it.

‘That’s the current situation.’

The Priest of Prophecy was looking at the future right now.

“*Ah…*”

“Father Lee Ki-Young,” Bahamut said.

“N-No,” I stuttered.

“What?”

“No…” I said.

I stretched out my hands as if I were having a nightmare.

My eyes were full of tears, and I had already forgotten the wounds that the black mage had inflicted on me.

“No… Mr. Bahamut… please…” I begged.

“Father?” he said.

“Please…”

I could see darkness devouring him.

He was so drunk and overwhelmed with power that he accepted that power—a demon's power.

“Don’t accept that power…” I said.

“…”

“You can no longer…” I mumbled.

I needed to talk as vaguely as possible.

“I…”

Of course, I gave him hints so that he'd be able to solve the puzzle himself. I mumbled things like, “Don’t accept that power,” “It’s dangerous,” and “Don’t get swallowed by darkness.”

I was sure he was anxious right now.

‘Did I… ’

Become corrupt? He was probably asking himself that question right now.

‘Why?’

The light that I was emitting was just too holy to laugh off. No one would think that I was acting. Who'd think that these tears of light were fake?

'Can you see that I can't speak because I'm choking up? You can see the trembling of my jaw, hands, and feet, right?'

Boom!

'Perfect timing.'

"Father!" Templar Genny shouted.

I was sure the other Templars were with him.

"F-Father?"

'Yeah, I'm sure I don't look so great. Can you see these scars caused by the black flame?'

'I know what you're thinking, and yep, he might be the one behind this.'

"Let go of Father Lee Ki-Young!" Templar Genny shouted.

The trainee had just shouted informally at his commander, and he even pointed his sword at Bahamut. He looked pretty hostile the way he glared at him with his sword out.

I doubted him a bit, but Templar Genny was really on my side.

"Calm down, Templar Genny. There's an intruder in the Underground Temple. There's a black mage who made a contract with a commander-level demon. The wounded—"

"But… F-Father… your arm…" Templar Genny stuttered.

'Yeah, my arm.'

"Your arm…" Templar Genny repeated.

"I'm fine. More importantly… please… take me to the wounded…" I told him.

'I'm fine, so take me to where the wounded are. It's… It's time to make a sacrifice.'

"Your arm…" Templar Genny said.

"Take me to them!" I shouted.

'My dreams are scary, damn it!'

CHAPTER 981
ALTANUS (18)

"Save… Save me…" someone begged.

"This way, Father!" Templar Genny shouted.

"*Ugh… Ack!*" I screamed.

"Please… *Ack!*"

"The holy power isn't working. Damn it… the holy power…" Draktaris grumbled.

"*Blergh…*"

"*Ahhhhh!*"

Gruesome wasn't enough to describe the situation.

If they had been just a bit late, I would have had a nightmare.

"Father…" Draktaris said.

"The priests must be bishops or higher, Father Draktaris," I suggested.

"I understand," Draktaris said.

"Please evacuate the ordinary priests. If I'm right…" I said.

'The burn might be contagious.'

"*Gaaaaah!*"

As expected, a priest grabbed their arm and screamed.

I was sure they touched the wound of the injured priest.

“We need priests capable of purification. This burn is like a plague,” I said.

It would spread to people with low Magic Resistance or Holy Power.

The holy power of ordinary priests was useless against it, so they were useless here.

A glance was enough for anyone to deduce that the injuries weren't just a simple burn. I was sure that even a child could deduce that by the fact that the patients were still breathing, even though they had been scorched black.

The pitch-black flames didn't kill anyone—no, it would be more accurate to say that it wasn't willing to give anyone permission to die while inflicting extreme pain on them.

Ironically, those who were dying were being kept alive by the plague.

“So cruel… What the hell… does it think of humans?” I mumbled. I was furious. I believed only a demon could think of such a devious scheme.

I felt someone grab my shaking hands.

“Father…” Templar Genny said.

“It’s fine, Templar Genny. I’m fine…” I reassured him.

The only thing priests who were bishops and lower could do was suppress the burn so it wouldn't get any worse. With my light, however, I believed I could drive out this plague.

I approached a patient in bed, and he was being suppressed by two Holy Knights.

“Don’t let go of him!”

“If he moves—”

“*Ahhh! Ahhhhhh!*”

I placed my hand on the patient’s forehead, and everyone became quiet as if they had been possessed by something.

I unleashed my holy power right afterward, and a radiant light enveloped the patient. The burn injury that couldn't be healed with ordinary holy power was reacting to mine, which had changed fundamentally upon receiving Lady Lucifer's blessing.

"*Ahh…*"

"F-Father."

They were witnessing… a miracle. The black stain that covered the patient from head to toe vanished beneath the radiant light. Every single wound that they had sustained from the pitch-black flame was recovering at a rate visible to the naked eye.

The injured patient, who had been screaming in pain, definitely felt themselves recovering because they looked up at me.

"You'll feel better," I reassured them.

"O Lucifer…" the patient mumbled.

Obviously, this wasn't an easy task. I needed to maintain a high level of concentration, and I had to use a lot more holy power than I thought. Beads of sweat formed all over my face and rolled down my chin.

"Next…" I said.

"Father…"

I didn't bother treating my arm because the Priest of Prophecy was worried about others more than his own pain. I was afraid I'd run out of holy power to treat others by treating myself, and I'd rather be in great pain than let that happen.

"Father! Father!" Templar Genny shouted.

"*Aaaaaah!*" I screamed.

"…"

"Next…" I mumbled.

There was radiant light everywhere. I was sure it was touching to see the Priest of Prophecy erasing the demonic brand of the pitch-black flame at breakneck speeds. I was doing something that needed several priests of at least a bishop or higher to do.

“I don’t think it’s an ordinary burn. Please notify the other bishops. This is almost like a plague. This isn’t the work of a priest of Rembil…” I informed them.

“…”

“…”

“Do you… know something?” he asked.

“The Monarch of Lies and Deception…” I mumbled.

“…!”

“Also known as the Master of Plagues…” I added.

“…”

“Belial, the commander of the demon army,” I said.

The shocking truth was finally revealed, and I heard people sighing everywhere.

“O Lucifer…”

“How could this…”

“O Lucifer… please save us!”

“Of course, nothing has been confirmed yet,” I said.

“What the hell have the Templars been doing that something like this happened in the Underground Temple? The Master of Plagues? The Monarch of Lies and Deception?” Draktaris complained.

It had been a while since I heard someone grumble along the lines of that.

It was Father Basel’s famous line.

“What the hell are the Templars doing?” Draktaris added.

Father Basel's famous line had to have come from this era.

“An intruder in the Underground Temple… Come on, does this even make sense?” Draktaris questioned.

Their job was to ensure that something like this wouldn't happen.

In other words, the priests were cleaning up the mess that the Templars had allowed to happen. Bahamut had no time to think about this, as he was shocked by the news of his corruption, but the Templars worried about their political influence were on edge.

The priests facing the plague head-on looked noble even in my eyes.

Of course, the Priest of Prophecy shone particularly brighter than everyone else, but overall, we all looked noble. Despite the horrors of the plague, the priests focused on treating the injured. I told the weaker priests to retreat, but they stayed at their stations.

They were comforting the wounded while squeezing as much holy power as they could from their frail bodies.

The Templars and the holy knights were dispatched for security reasons, and they were all watching the scene with the Atentas, who were dispatched to provide support. A small number of people expressed their dissatisfaction toward the Templars, but everyone probably had the same thought.

‘Where the hell are they, and what are they doing?’

Of course, I was busy right now…

‘Because I need to track down the black mage.’

Starting from the area where the explosion had occurred, they conducted many investigations. Even if they managed to find the black mage, it wouldn't change the fact that their influence was under threat.

‘Naturally.’

Regardless of the outcome, they would definitely hold a hearing. The best outcome here was if many forces ended up turning their backs on the Templars. To make matters worse, news of corruption had just been delivered to Bahamut…

The black mage was someone unknown to me, but they were helping me unintentionally.

'That's not all.'

"Move out of my way. Sir James, are you there?" Deliha said.

"We're in the process of keeping things under control. As soon as it's purified—"

"No, there's no need for that. I'm going to take Sir James right now and leave this place, Father Draktaris," Deliha interrupted him.

'Leave?'

From now on, no one could leave.

"Lady Deliha," someone said, but it wasn't Draktaris.

"I'm sorry, but you must follow the protocols. We're in the middle of a formal investigation of the people invited to the social gathering," the Templar explained.

The Templars were trying their best to deal with the issue, and they had no choice but to do this. If one were to think about it, doing an investigation on the people who had been invited to the social gathering was a reasonable choice.

The problem was that the sponsors would be displeased with this decision.

"Are you… ignoring me and the Duke of Harveen right now?" she questioned.

The snobbish nobles wouldn't just stand idly by. They'd probably follow the protocols, but the nobles would surely retaliate. I was sure the one in charge of internal affairs among the Templars was shaking nervously right now.

"Duke Harveen will not forget what happened here," Deliha threatened.

"I'm sorry, Lady Deliha, but…" the Templar paused.

"…"

"The Red Magic Tower won't just stand by and do nothing!" Deliha shouted.

"It's just a formal investigation," they said.

The social gathering wasn't going to end here.

The fact that I could decide when it would end was important.

Obviously, Saint Altanus would finally show herself to placate the sponsors. Upon making contact with her, the range of my influence would increase.

I was already drawing many plans in my head. Three days? One week? Making the Templars an enemy group and isolating them wasn't hard at all.

More importantly, Bahamut was probably being overwhelmed right now, so he'd just stand by and watch.

After treating one of the patients, I decided to calm down the furious crowd.

And that was when I heard a distinct sound…

[The Grave Keeper of the Underground Temple quest has been completed.]

[Demons' Social Gathering Hall quest has been completed.]

[Templars' Training Ground quest has been completed.]

[…quest has been completed.]

[…quest has been completed.]

[…quest has been completed.]

The quests that I had sent out were completed all at once.

I stopped walking and pondered, *'What's going on?'*

Actually, not all quests were completed. The quest with Father Draktaris was still in

progress, and the envoy quest was still ongoing as well. Power Boost, Demon From Hell, and a few other quests were still ongoing.

'What… the hell? Damn it… Why aren't they getting completed in order?'

'Why did they skip so many quests?'

'No, no.'

They didn't skip. It makes more sense to say that they completed the quests all at once but left some of the quests just one step away from completion.

'The message.'

I thought about the quest list.

There was a certain period between the completed and the not completed quests.

[The quest has been completed.]

[The quest is in progress…]

[The quest is in progress…]

There was a dot for the completed quests and three dots for those in progress.

It was a code used by Jin Cheong, Ji-Hye noona, and me. We made it based on Morse code. I was taken aback, but I felt like pulling out my hair upon solving the puzzle.

— Variable, annihilation, and danger.

And my consciousness began to fade away…

CHAPTER 982
ALTANUS (19)

'What the hell happened? Variable, annihilation, and danger? Give me the details, you incompetent fool. I can't tell if you guys are at risk of annihilation or if you've already been annihilated.'

Personally, I had no choice but to lean to the former.

Actually, I was pretty sure that it was the former.

I was very certain that Demon Summoner Jin Cheong wouldn't send a message when something had already happened. He was incompetent, but he wouldn't stand by and do nothing.

I wasn't saying this to comfort myself.

'He's not that *incompetent.'*

Our Commander Jin wasn't so incompetent that he'd push an army into a fire pit.

'Where did it go wrong?'

There was a high chance that they were the ones who made a mistake, not me, but I had to keep thinking about where things had gone wrong. I wasn't sure, but Jin Cheong probably noticed something was wrong when the Draktaris raid began.

Jin Cheong probably noticed that something was amiss when the raid slowed down, and he probably felt like he needed a backup plan. I was sure that was the reason he started the next raid, even though the Draktaris raid wasn't complete yet.

He needed to complete enough quests to complete his message.

'What's the variable?'

Bahamut could have encountered the expedition group too early, or there could have

been something wrong with Draktaris.

'Did some of the guild members end up dying? Did they escape right after encountering the variable?'

The troops would disperse, leaving only the minimum amount of troops to complete the quests. In that case, then they couldn't fall into despair yet, as they still had enough manpower to transfer to the other squads.

I thought perhaps they had transferred the troops upon getting annihilated, but as I said, Jin Cheong wasn't *that* incompetent that he'd take care of the issue only *after* it had occurred.

People like us always had a few backup plans. It was funny, but his backup plans were making me feel worried.

'That arrogant bastard has just handed over the burden to me… '

In other words, his backup plans didn't work out at all. They were probably standing on their last legs by now. Asking me for help was the worst decision he could make, and he'd avoid making that decision at all costs, but he had just made that decision.

'Damn it… damn it… '

'How bad is the damage? Any Casualties? Is the pig doing okay? Is there anything I can do from here? No, can I even send them another message? What if they can still withdraw the troops? What if they're already in the middle of following the retreat manual? Can they even complete my quests?'

Jung Ha-Yan was fine as long as nothing had happened to Han Sora.

I was more worried about Jo Hye-Jin and the pig because I was afraid that they were going to say something like "Leave me here!" and jump into the fire pit just to save a few people.

I told myself not to be anxious and be calm, but it wasn't working at all.

The thoughts popping into my head made me unable to think properly.

'There was no other way. First of all, the quests… Again… no. H-How long has it been

since I fell asleep?'

The first thing I saw when I opened my eyes was an unfamiliar ceiling.

I tried to stand up, but someone stopped me.

'How long has it been?'

"You shouldn't move yet. The wounds that are visible to the naked eye look like they've all been healed, but…"

"…"

"…"

I immediately knew who was talking to me.

'Saint Altanus.'

Her face was covered with a veil, but I was sure Benigoa was the one who had treated my wounds. Except for the fact that there were only a handful of people capable of completely erasing that burn injury, I could just feel that the person before me was Benigoa.

It seemed that she didn't want me to find out that she was Benigoa because she even changed her voice, but it wasn't enough to fool me.

Her acting skills were outstanding, but she was an awkward actress.

'Damn it.'

"How… long have I been unconscious…" I asked.

"It's been almost six hours. You were injured and exhausted. I think it's best if you take a break for the time being. We're still treating the wounded… so you don't have to worry too much and just focus on taking care of yourself," she explained.

'It's been six hours?'

"Six hours…" I mumbled.

‘Shit… shit… ’

I checked the quest screen again.

There were two additional completed quests.

This wasn’t a code.

This was a signal that they were still alive, as they wouldn’t have completed these quests for no reason. The first signal was four hours ago, and the second signal was two hours ago. The two-hour interval was in accordance with the manual.

There were a total of eight quests remaining, and I was able to determine that the expedition group had been alive for at least sixteen hours.

If I were to register a quest again and ensure that he'd find that quest, then we would be able to keep in contact. It had only been sixteen hours, but it would be unrealistic for me to expect them to find the quests while they were probably in hiding.

'It’s probably best to move for now, but… what happened to the last quest? Why is that last one… '

‘Huh?’

I felt like I was having a random seizure.

‘Uh… ’

I was having a hard time breathing, and my head was throbbing in pain.

“Father Lee Ki-Young?” Benigoa said.

“*Haa… haa… haa…*”

“Father, Father?” she repeated.

“Daaamn it…” I mumbled.

“Excuse me?” she questioned.

[…quest has been completed.]

‘Damn it, it hasn’t been six hours yet.’

I couldn’t help but look at Benigoa with a resentful look.

‘Fourteen hours from now on.’

It was clear what I needed to do.

‘I should have had a meeting with Commander Jin or Ji-Hye noona before coming here.’

The situation was bad. I wanted to leave this place right now and return to the present, but the social gathering had just been shut down. Actually, even if I were to go back now, I wouldn't be able to offer any solution.

I was here because of the future that Kasugano Yuno had seen. I couldn't check what Jin Cheong meant by "variable," I couldn't deal with my task related to Bahamut, and I couldn’t even leave a message for Draktaris.

‘I couldn’t even work on the task with Altanus… ’

I wanted to execute Plan B, but it didn't mean I could actually do that.

Before that, there were many things I needed to explain to Benigoa, such as the iron maiden, the path that she'd have to take after this, and what she was going to do once I had become Altanus.

Naturally, I took advantage of the tense atmosphere and writhed in pain.

“*Ack…!*”

“Father Lee Ki-Young!” Benigoa exclaimed and used her holy power on me. My physical wounds disappeared, but I needed to act like the brand of the pitch-black flames was still inside me.

‘I don’t have enough time to make Benigoa believe me.’

Benigoa and I were getting closer, but it wasn’t enough for me to talk about entering the iron maiden and becoming a god observing the world from up above.

“Miss Benigoa…” I mumbled, speaking cautiously while clinging to my unstable consciousness.

“Beni—Miss Benigoa,” I repeated.

“What… are you talking about? Who is Benigoa…”

“I’ll… protect you no matter what,” I added.

I couldn’t see her face because of the veil, but she was definitely staring at me as if I were crazy.

“…”

“I’ll make sure… to protect you… this time, Miss Benigoa,” I said.

“Father… Lee Ki-Young?”

However, the Priest of Prophecy would never lie.

I had a sorrowful look as if I were looking at my lover, whom I had been missing for hundreds of years now. I bawled and raised my trembling hand to grab her hand.

“I’m sorry… that I couldn’t… protect you. I’m really sorry,” I said.

“…”

For some reason, she looked angry. She was probably thinking that I was spouting a bunch of nonsense again. She probably thought that "Benigoa" was the name of my old lover, but that wasn't the case at all.

“No… Miss Altanus… *Haa… haa…*” I mumbled.

“…”

“I’m sorry… Miss Altanus… for leaving… you along… for so long… I’m really sorry. This time, I’ll…” I paused.

“What… are you talking about right now?” Benigoa asked.

"*Ahh…* my everything. My light," I said.

"Father Lee Ki-Young?"

Her veil fell, and the face behind it was clearly Benigoa's face. She seemed confused because she had no idea what was going on, but she hurriedly covered her face as if she had gotten caught red-handed, but she lowered her hands slowly.

The sight of that convinced me that she was thinking along the lines of this—*'This man is aware of the fact that Benigoa and Altanus are the same people. I don't know why, but this priest from aboveground seems to be really familiar with me.*

'He's also been trying to hide that fact. He has also received… Lucifer's divine message.'

I was sure of that, as she seemed kind of in a daze right now. She'd definitely ask many questions once she understood what was going on, so I forced myself to pat her head. I did it as if it were natural and had done it many times before.

I closed my eyes, acting like I was in a daze.

'She'll probably ask about my identity, why I was acting as if I was familiar with her. If I had approached her, knowing that she was Saint Altanus, and what I meant when I apologized for leaving her alone and not being able to protect her.'

"What are you?" Benigoa mumbled. It seemed that impatience was one of her natural traits, as exactly two hours and twelve minutes later, she started throwing out questions just as I had expected.

Of course, I had to answer her.

"I—"

"Don't think about lying to me," Benigoa interrupted me.

"I… I…" I paused.

"Please answer me, Father," Benigoa begged.

"I'm a regressor," I replied.

'Yeah, I'm a regressor. I regressed to save my ex-lover, who will meet a tragic end. I'm sure this setup is going to work.

CHAPTER 983
ALTANUS (20)

It was a precious secret that I had been keeping to myself this whole time.

I wondered if this was how Kim Hyun-Sung felt right before confessing to me.

My hands and feet were shaking a bit, and it was hard to maintain a composed face.

It was difficult to tell someone this precious secret. There was this anxiety about whether she would believe me or not. I was also worried that she'd think I was crazy, so I was finding it hard to stay calm.

'I can just imitate Hyun-Sung and act like a sad little puppy.'

Three seconds later, I could then have an anxiety attack.

I looked calm, but anyone could tell that I was nervous.

I also needed to act like I was worried about being abandoned.

However, the look in my eyes was the most important.

Showing the pain I felt over the years of my life in my eyes was incredibly important here. My method acting had gotten to such a terrifying level after years of experience that I had goosebumps all over me.

Benigoa even looked nervous while listening to my nonsense.

I had the ability to make my nonsense not sound like nonsense.

'Yeah, I'm a regressor.'

The setting was like this—A priest working aboveground coincidentally met Benigoa, and the two developed deep feelings toward her. In the end, I decided to stay underground for her sake, and our fate was going to be either tragic or happy

ever after.

Unfortunately, I wouldn't be able to stop Saint Altanus' downfall. I wouldn't be able to protect her from her tragic end, and I would end up dying as well. Through an unknown power, however, I became a regressor, going back in time a few days before receiving an invitation.

I suffered through the same hardships again through the fate that was bestowed upon me, and after attending the social gathering once more, I started making a plan. Yeah, a plan to save Benigoa—no, Altanus.

“What are you—”

“I understand it’s hard to believe. I know it sounds ridiculous, especially coming from a person you just met. I’m not asking you to believe me. I’m not asking you to… believe and follow me. It’s just…” I trailed off.

“What do you mean?” Benigoa asked.

“I just… want you to know that I came here in order to protect you, Miss Benigoa. Just… Just hear me out for now,” I begged.

“That… can’t be… A regressor? That’s nonsense…” Benigoa mumbled.

Obviously, she was confused at first and was denying reality. I didn’t expect her to believe me right away, but I thought her reaction wasn’t that bad. At least she didn’t look at me as if I were a lunatic. Instead of just laughing at me, she was actually shocked.

“You called me Benigoa because…”

“I didn’t want you to be called Altanus. You wanted me to call you Benigoa whenever we were alone,” I told her.

“The library!” Benigoa shouted.

“Our meeting in the library wasn’t intentional. I tried to avoid you, but…” I trailed off.

We ended up meeting, as that was what destiny had in store for me.

I couldn't avoid destiny even if I wanted to avoid it.

I called her Benigoa because I couldn't hide my feelings for her.

Benigoa and I were tied together by an invisible soul string.

"I can't believe you, Father. I'm sorry, but that's ridiculous…" Benigoa said.

"Like I said earlier, I'm not telling you this because I want you to believe me, Miss Benigoa. What I want to tell you is…" I paused.

"…"

"Saint Altanus will lose her power," I revealed.

"…"

I'm lucky.

"I don't know why, but Saint Altanus' power will gradually disappear," I said.

Her expression became stiff.

"No one knows it right now, but everyone will eventually know the fact that she is gradually losing her power," I said.

She was losing her power, even now, and she was aware of it.

"The continent will start collapsing," I continued.

"…"

"Lady Lucifer… Lady Lucifer will abandon the continent," I added.

"That's not true! She wouldn't abandon us…" Benigoa argued.

"She won't answer you," I told her.

"…"

“Have you heard it before?” I asked.

“…”

“Have you ever heard… her voice?” I asked.

“N-Nonsense! You expect me to believe that?!” Benigoa shouted.

“Tell me if you ever felt her,” I said.

I was sure she had never heard Lucifer's voice before, as Lucifer had already decided to abandon the continent. Right now, I was sure Lucifer was thinking about running away after squeezing as much profit as she could from the continent.

“The continent will collapse, and the unthinkable will happen. Saint Altanus… Saint Altanus will choose to sacrifice herself. She’ll lock herself up in the iron maiden, and she'd become the continent's foundation to protect it, I explained.

I felt like I’d been crying a lot these days, so I wasn’t sure if I could even cry some more, but this was the time to cry.

“That can’t be…” Benigoa mumbled.

“…”

“It’s a lie…” Benigoa said.

“The Templars will become thirsty for your blood. The surface world and this underground temple will be in chaos. That’s all I know,” I told her.

“Lies…” Benigoa said.

'Yeah, I’m lying. A big… I mean, a white lie.'

“Father…” Benigoa said.

“In order to take you out from the iron maiden…” I trailed off.

I could still remember how I struggled and did my best to no avail.

The world had pressured her to sacrifice herself, and if Benigoa didn't step into the iron maiden, the continent would be destroyed. In exchange for suffering inside the iron maiden, she'd obtain a massive amount of her holy power, and she'd use it to protect the continent.

By then, I was sure no one in the Underground Temple wanted her to come out from the iron maiden, and the ones who made it worse were the Templars.

Lee Ki-Young, who had attempted to take her out, met a tragic end.

“So that’s… how you died,” Benigoa said.

“…”

“If… what you say is true…” Benigoa paused.

'I think I almost got her... '

“What exactly were we?” Benigoa asked.

“We were… lovers,” I answered.

'You think I'll risk my life for an acquaintance?'

“How… d-d-did we become… l-lovers?” she asked.

I proceeded to tell her our story, and of course, I made sure my story would sound reasonable. It was painful for me, but I spoke as if I were enjoying it. It was painful to recall our memories, but I was overjoyed to share with her the time we spent together.

Of course, I exaggerated some parts of it.

‘Like how she always wanted to come outside.’

“That’s… what you always said,” I told her.

‘That you wanted to be normal… ’

“You always wanted to live a normal life…” I continued.

'And you didn't want to be a saint… '

Benigoa's thoughts were pretty obvious. All I did was exaggerate. I told her stories unknown to her, and I told her things that she wanted to hear. I told her every little detail, such as how we often ate together, stayed up late together, and prayed together.

'Damn it, I'm wasting too much time.'

I was becoming anxious by the minute, but Benigoa seemed to be enjoying my stories, regardless of whether they were true or not. I knew why, as these were the stories she wanted to hear. I was sure it was entertaining for her.

"I knew it. You have a knack for making people feel frustrated," Benigoa commented.

"…"

"I'm sure I did that because of how frustrated I felt. You should have been aggressive," Benigoa said.

"…"

"I was wondering why you were so aggressive when we first met… You did that because you regretted your previous life. *Ah!* This doesn't mean I believe you yet. I'm saying this on the assumption that you're telling me the truth," Benigoa said.

She probably felt like she had returned from being Altanus to Benigoa.

"*Haha.* That's right," I laughed.

I received another quest completion message.

'Ten hours… '

We spent two hours just talking and laughing with each other.

'Damn it… '

"So…" Benigoa said.

“Yes?”

“So if… what you’re saying is the truth, what do I need to do?” Benigoa asked.

“…” “You don’t need to do anything,” I replied.

“What?”

“Like I said, you don’t need to do anything. You just need to enjoy your life,” I clarified.

“H-How can you say that?” Benigoa stuttered.

“That’s the reason I came here,” I told her.

“What exactly are you planning on doing? *Ah*… I’m asking under the assumption that what you’re telling me is the truth,” Benigoa reminded.

“I won’t let you sacrifice yourself,” I said.

“…”

'I’m going to sacrifice myself in your place because that’s my job. I can’t let anyone else do it. This is a win-win situation for you because you'll get to live, and you won't have to do anything, too.'

I spread my wings slightly to show that I could support the continent in her place.

Obviously, Benigoa’s eyes widened.

“*Huh?*”

My holy wings and my status as a regressor weren’t related in any way.

I simply spread my wings, but anyone could easily misunderstand that my regressor status and my holy wings were related.

‘Would a guy with such holy wings really lie?'

'You think a person who’s emitting such a holy light while crying holy tears would lie?'

I patted her head.

I had no idea whether it was because of my habit of patting her head or not, but even I thought that I was acting in a surprisingly natural way.

Altanus didn't pose awkwardly like Benigoa; her pose just now felt really out of place.

She had done this a few times in my past life, and she reacted naturally as well as if it were a long-time habit of hers.

"…"

"So it was true…" Benigoa mumbled.

I nodded and kissed her forehead.

She was surprised, but she didn't avoid it as if she was possessed by something.

"*Ah…*"

I remained quiet and enjoyed it.

"It's a shame that our meeting was short… but it looks like we won't have much time to spend together," I told her.

"…"

"Actually…" I paused.

"…"

"There's something I want to tell you if we ever meet again," I said.

"…" "I love you," I confessed.

'Smile sadly here… '

"I-I…" Benigoa stuttered.

“I love you,” I repeated.

“I…”

Benigoa was at a loss for words, and all she could do was blink her big eyes.

She was pretty naive, and she seemed to have gotten immersed in my story because she started crying.

“This time… I’ll protect you, Miss Benigoa,” I told her.

I had to say some cliched lines.

And that was when I heard another loud explosion…

“I’ll be back,” I said.

I had ten hours left.

“Shiit… I only have ten hours left…”

Kaboooooom!

“Only ten hours left…”

Actually, it could be shorter than that.

Since I had chosen a clear route…

‘I might end up getting forgotten.’

I felt like the others were already starting to forget me. It was probably just me, but I felt like one of my eyes reflected on the window was… losing its light.

CHAPTER 984
ALTANUS (21)

I was sure it was just me because I had yet to execute my plans.

No, it *had* to be just me.

'I have to hold out for ten hours or hold out until all the quests I prepared are complete.'

I had no idea what the expedition team was up to, but they could hold out for ten hours.

If their memories were gradually being erased…

'They could take other actions.'

Jin Cheong's side could be coming up with another plan, and I was sure he'd come up with a backup plan to not forget me. He'd either write it down on his tiny notepad or prepare a signal or code that only he would recognize.

The important part wasn't losing connection before the ten-hour mark.

The problem was…

'He's the only one who will think that there's nothing wrong.'

I wasn't sure how losing memories of me was going to affect them, but if the same thing were to happen to Jung Ha-Yan or Kim Hyun-Sung, I could already deduce what was going to happen.

They would probably run rampant and quiver like they were having a seizure, and I could honestly see that happening. Hye-Jin and the others would become anxious, but at least… they wouldn't abandon their tasks.

If the expedition group was in danger, and I had to completely rely on Kim Hyun-

Sung and Jung Ha-Yan, then the problem would get worse. Kim Hyun-Sung would go on about the third life, say sorry, and talk about how it was not worth protecting at all blah, blah, blah…

'He might actually be the better one.'

I was worried because I had no idea what kind of trouble Jung Ha-Yan was going to kick up.

'I wonder how Ji-Hye noona is doing.'

She was probably trying hard to find a way as well.

Regardless of what was going to happen, the important part here was carrying out the tasks that I could do. If people were really forgetting about me in real-time, then it would be reasonable for me to complete all the tasks that I had already started.

I started moving.

The bombs that the black mage had installed were making the extreme situation even more extreme.

Kabooooooooom!

The bombs weren't that strong, but the explosions were enough to terrify the people here. I heard screams everywhere as if the explosions had sent the flames of hell everywhere, and people were running away while keeping their heads low.

It seemed like they were instinctively running toward the place they thought was safe, but they wouldn't be able to find a safe place in this chaotic Underground Temple.

A few Templars were containing the crowd, but…

'Who would trust you guys?'

They knew better than anyone that the Templars wouldn't be able to control this situation. The fear created by the hellfire explosion and their fear of the explosions couldn't be contained by the group that had already failed once.

"*Kyahhh!*"

"Move! Shit! Move out of the way!"

"E-Everyone!"

"I'm leaving this place!"

Booom!

"Lady Deliha!"

"Damn it! Damn it!"

"Let us leave this place, damn it!"

This was the same sight I saw at that black market. There were people cowering in the corner, while there were some people hiding under the decorative tables. Most of the people tried to get away from the explosions without choosing a particular destination.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

The explosions continued.

The explosions seemed like they were part of a massive bluff, but this was enough to plunge the entire Underground Temple into chaos.

To make matters worse…

'I can't really move around either, damn it.'

So many people were running around desperately, and I couldn't even move, let alone maintain my balance. People were colliding with my shoulders, and I got worried about getting pushed back by the crowd.

And that was when I heard a familiar voice."Father!"

"…"

“Father! Father!”

“Genny!” I shouted.

I heard Templar Genny’s voice from afar.

He pushed through the crowd while biting his lips.

“Father!” Genny shouted, grabbing my hand.

“Father Draktaris—”

“You have to get away, Father! I’ll take… you to a safe place… for—” Genny interrupted me.

“I have to go to Father Draktaris,” I interrupted him.

“But…”

“Please take me to Father Draktaris,” I requested.

‘Nothing is happening now, damn it. It’s all a bluff.’

Of course, the explosions had to be somewhat realistic.

It felt like the Underground Temple was going to crumble anytime soon.

The chaos gave birth to more chaos, and the chaos would transform into bigger chaos. Despite the fact that nothing was really happening, everyone was running around as if the world were ending, so it felt like the world was really going to end.

Templar Genny didn’t look that different from other people.

He had received formal training, but he was still afraid.

It made sense. After all, he was still a rookie, so this situation was probably terrifying for him.

I was sure he wanted to take me to a safe place, but he couldn’t ignore my gaze. I looked as if I was about to face an indescribable fate, so he probably thought it was

best to listen to me.

There was also a gleam of responsibility in my eyes.

“B-But…” Genny stuttered.

I bit my lips and tried to shake off his hand, but he pulled me.

“Father Draktaris is probably still with the wounded. This way,” Genny said.

“Templar Genny…” I said.

“I’m too stupid to know what’s going on right now…” Genny said.

‘It’s natural not to know what’s going on.’

“But I believe you’ll be able to resolve this,” Genny added.

“…”

“Please save the Underground Temple, Father,” Genny begged.

Obviously, I didn’t say anything because I didn’t want to interrupt the actor who was in the middle of acting out his part.

Kaboom!

“This way, Father!” Genny shouted.

‘He’s really immersed.’

There were loud explosions, and Genny reacted like a demon was about to appear every time there was an explosion.

I was embarrassed because he was sweating and was genuinely trying to carry out his role on the set. Of course, it wasn't like he was useless. He actually broke through the large crowd and created a path for us to take.

“Father!”

But it was sad seeing him act like that when there was basically no threat.

He was too immersed.

Would he notice it soon?

I used a single-use catalyst because I was worried about him getting disappointed about the fact that there was actually no threat.

A large arm of a monster popped out from the wall.

It happened out of nowhere, but Genny reacted quickly, rolling on the ground while holding onto me. I rolled on the ground as well. Genny unsheathed his sword and made quick work of the arm.

"*Hyah!*"

"…"

"It's weak…" Genny mumbled.

'Shit, should I have not done that?'

"No… it's not weak. I became stronger. It's thanks to Father…" Genny paused.

"…"

"I became stronger thanks to you," Genny continued.

'Is there no place to hide?'

Templar Genny looked confident. This one battle… was enough to make a recruit or even a low-ranking Templar feel confident about themselves.

Earlier, he was filled with nervousness, but he seemed to have grown a little stronger. He was still a rookie, but I could see that the rookie Templar was trying to become stronger through this incident.

I felt like the narrator ought to say something along the lines of, "This was when Templar Genny became even stronger."

Templar Genny was a butterfly who had morphed out of fear and despair. He rolled gracefully on the ground, making sure that the collapsing walls wouldn't land on me.

He truly had immense potential, and I could see his hesitation disappearing from his actions.

Thanks to that, I managed to reach Draktaris in the blink of an eye.

“I brought Father Lee Ki-Young, Father Draktaris!” Genny announced.

“…”

“I brought Father Lee Ki-Young!” Genny repeated.

The door was opened.

They probably had a meeting about whether they would open the door or not, as they had yet to check the situation outside.

Draktaris and the priests here couldn’t abandon the wounded, so the guards had no choice but to worry about Draktaris’ safety. It was a good thing that they had made that choice, as it was the right choice to make.

As expected, Draktaris was surrounded by his guards as he approached me and grabbed my hands, saying, “I’m glad. I’m really glad that you’re safe, Priest of Prophecy."

“Right now-”

“I actually sent three of my guards outside to assess the situation outside. I couldn’t leave because of the wounded here… Can you tell me what’s happening outside? Actually… are you feeling better?” Draktaris asked.

“I’m… not sure either, but… I think that the things that are going to happen in the future are happening a bit earlier than expected. I know it’s hard to understand… but it’s highly likely that there’s a variable,” I replied.

“…”

“…”

“If the future you saw… is true, then we don’t have time to do this. I must take my guards and gather the troops who are making preparations in the Underground Temple,” Draktaris suggested.

“I understand your worry, but Father Draktaris…” I paused.

“…” “You must stay here,” I told him.

“…”

“You must stay here at least until things quiet down,” I said.

“What do you mean?” Draktaris asked.

“If you leave this room now, you… you…” I paused.

Do you understand what I'm trying to say?

There’s no way he wouldn’t know; he wasn’t an idiot, after all.

Draktaris was quick-witted, so he asked, “Did you witness my death?"

'That’s right. You’ll die if you leave here now. You’ll die a painful and worthless death.'

“I’m a servant of Lucifer, Father. I’m not afraid of death—”

“I… I…” I mumbled.

“…”

“I’m afraid to see you die! Father Draktaris,” I shouted.

“…”

“I’m afraid!” I repeated.

“…”

“I know better than anyone that you’re not supposed to die here. In the far future… In the very far future, you’ll do something great, Father. I can’t tell you the details, but

you… will save this Underground Temple… and Saint Altanus. You'll do greater things than stabilizing this place right now," I told him.

"…"

"I'm well aware that you can't ignore the pains of others, and this decision is going to torment you more than anyone, but…" I paused and made eye contact with him before continuing, "promise me this…"

My eyes were filled with utmost sincerity.

"Please swear it on Lady Lucifer's name," I requested.

"…"

"Swear on Lady Lucifer's name that until they find you, even if it's not me… I'm talking about the people who truly love Lady Lucifer, people who want to reform the Underground Temple, people blessed by the Goddess, and those who have been selected by the light… swear on Lady Lucifer's name that until they appear before you…!" I exclaimed.

"Priest of Prophecy…" he mumbled.

"You must survive and wait… be patient until they appear before you… be patient for the sake of the hope that will come someday…" I muttered. A teardrop, a sad look, and a strong will. "Swear that you'll live… for the sake of that day!"

I spoke without any hesitation and yelled, "Promise me."

CHAPTER 985
ALTANUS (22)

This man… this man was determined to die.

The saint was trying to burn his final flame here.

He was trying to prevent the destruction of the Underground Temple and the continent by sacrificing himself.

They had no idea what was going on outside, but I knew what was going on out there.

Lee Ki-Young—the Priest of Prophecy—was trying to calm things down by sacrificing himself.

The atmosphere was suggesting that. Draktaris and his guards seemed to be certain of that as well. Draktaris was cautious about his words despite knowing what was right and which decision would bring about a more positive result.

“What…”

There wasn’t any hesitation in my eyes.

“What do you mean by that?” Draktaris asked.

'You know what I mean, so I’m not going to answer. I’m not going to tell you what I meant just now because everyone knows the answer.'

It was like we were on thin ice.

Templar Genny, who was listening to the adults talk, looked at me nervously.

“There’s nothing I can tell you. However… However, I want you to promise me that, Father Draktaris. It’s my last request,” I told him.

“I can’t… I can’t do that, Priest of Prophecy. I’m sure there’s another way. If we… work together and find a way—”

“I can tell you that with certainty. There’s no other way,” I interrupted him.

Out of the fourteen million futures I had seen, there was only one future where we won.

“I know that it's a difficult task, and I know it’s hard to accept, but…” I trailed off.

“…”

“But you must endure it, Father Draktaris. I know I sound selfish by saying this… but you must endure it,” I told him.

“…”

“I trust that you’ll keep your promise and be the single ray of light that shines in darkness. No matter what hardship comes your way… even if there’s a situation you can’t endure, you must do your best, but today… today isn’t your time to die,” I explained.

“Father…” Draktaris mumbled.

“I… I believe Lady Lucifer has given everyone a role that fits them. It’s my mission… to protect you in this place. It’s my job to guide the people who will fight for the continent and for Lady Lucifer in the far future,” I added.

“…”

My words weren’t convincing because I wasn’t trying to be reasonable in the first place.

My remark was to make people emotional, to trust me, and to tell them that this place wasn’t their stage.

Of course, Draktaris had no obligation to grant my request or keep his promise.

However, h-he wasn’t *that* cruel to betray the saint’s sacrifice.

I was sure he wasn't aware of how difficult it was for me to make this decision and how much I had suffered so far.

He was the archbishop with a ton of responsibilities, so I was sure he was trying his best to understand my feelings. If he were a priest with no responsibilities, he would have refused my request.

"Y-You… have my word," Draktaris answered while suppressing his heartache as much as possible. "I swear on Lady Lucifer's name, and I promise… to follow your request."

I smiled, letting him know that I could finally rest in peace.

My smile was sad, and I looked like I knew that he was going to agree with my request.

I told everyone through my smile that this was the right thing to do.

Draktaris frowned, looking like he was trying his best not to cry and that he ought to send the saint off with a smile, but he cried too easily.

"Well then…"

I didn't have much time to say farewell to them.

It'd be a shame if I didn't grab the hands of the other priests and pray together with them.

"O Lucifer…"

"There will be light."

"Blessings…"

"Please watch over the Priest of Prophecy. Please… Please always stay by his side."

": Lady Lucifer will watch over all of you."

I didn't forget about the guards, either.

“Please take care of Father Draktaris, Sir Neymarian,” I requested.

“Y-Yes, sir…” Sir Neymarian stuttered.

“Sir Serilicia, you have a beautiful smile, so please see me out with a smile,” I said.

“*Heuk… heuk…* O Priest of Prophecy,” Sir Serilicia said, sobbing.

“Lady Lucifer’s blessing will be with you,” I told them.

After kissing everyone on the cheek, I walked out with footsteps, intending to become a saint.

“F-Father.”

Of course, there were still some whom I had yet to say goodbye to.

‘Yeah, this is the end for you as well.’

Surprised?

I was sure he had never imagined that we’d part ways here, but it was time to part ways.

We would never meet again.

I was talking about Templar Genny, who tugged at my sleeve.

“It’s the same for you, Templar Genny,” I said.

“…”

“This is where we say goodbye…” I told him.

“What?”

“Please take care of Father Draktaris. T-There are many things I want to say to you… but I want to thank you for everything before anything else. Our time together was short… but you gave me a lot of strength…” I muttered.

“Why… are you telling me this?” Genny asked.

'It seems like you don’t have a lot to do, but you do. Father Draktaris needs one Templar on his side.'

“I can’t… do that. This doesn’t make sense,” Genny said.

'What do you mean? You can do it.'

“Father… Father…” Genny was already crying. “Please don’t go. I can’t let you go. I just can’t. *Heuk… heuk.*”

'What do you mean? Who gave you the right to say that you won't let me go? I’m the one who decided to go. '

I couldn’t help but think that he was still truly young. Earlier, he seemed pretty reliable, but his face was now covered in tears and snot.

It happened so suddenly that I was surprised.

It seemed like he already felt like crying from the prayer event earlier and had simply been holding his tears back. Now that it was time to say farewell, he couldn’t hold back his tears anymore.

His jaw was shaking, and I could tell how emotional he was right now.

He was still holding my sleeve, and his eyes were telling me that he wasn’t going to send me away. I wasn’t sure why he was so engrossed, but it was probably because he knew where this was going.

‘At least he’s not dumb… ’

“Father… So… so…” Genny stuttered.

‘Am I going to die?’

I would probably die, so it was understandable why he’d think that way, but I needed to make a white lie to calm him down.

“I think I’m heading back up,” I told him.

“What?”

It was an angel's pure white lie.

“I’ll probably head to the surface and find a way to get help from there,” I said.

“…” “I’ll be going with Miss Metel,” I added.

Rift Guardian Metel was reliable, and I was going to leave this place someday, anyway.

I had always been a guest here, which meant that I couldn't stay here forever. Although the timing was pretty dramatic… telling them that I was leaving to get help from above was pretty believable.

Of course, he didn't believe me at all; he probably thought that I was lying to him.

“Lies…” Genny mumbled.

‘Yeah, it’s a lie.’

“Stop lying. *Heuk…* Father,” Genny sniffled.

But…

“I swear on the name of Lady Lucifer, Templar Genny,” I told him.

'This is it. Lucifer will forgive me for this white lie.'

It sounded like a lie, but no one criticized me for it.

There wasn’t a fool quick-witted enough to think I would lie while swearing on Her name. I made the white lie for the kid who was going to be hurt. It was a lie that Lucifer would be happy about.

The innocent fool nodded and asked, “Are you telling the truth?”

“Yes,” I replied.

“Y-You’re not lying, right?” Genny stuttered.

“Yes, I’m telling the truth. I can’t tell you that I’ll come back down soon… because I have a lot of work as well… and it might actually be difficult for me to come back. I can’t promise you… that we’ll meet again…” I told him.

I was being cautious about my words.

Templar Genny nodded.

Although it was hard to understand, he seemed to be trying his best to understand. He couldn’t believe it, but he was forcing himself to believe it.

He had chosen the path that would make him suffer less.

He was still young, so he had unconsciously chosen the path that was the least painful for him.

As expected, he asked, “C-Can I come visit you?”

I bent down a bit, made eye contact with him, and patted his head.

“Of course, Templar Genny,” I answered.

“*Heuk… Kgh…*”

“I look forward… to the day we meet again, Sir Neymarian and Serilicia. Please take care of Genny,” I requested.

I was obviously telling them to stop him from following me.

With that, I kicked the door open and didn’t look back.

“Father! Father!!! Let go of me! Let go!” Genny shouted.

“…” “Father! *Kgh*…”

I was a busy man, so I ignored his cries.

The sounds of explosions and the heavy atmosphere enveloped me.

'Ah, next… next is… '

“So this is where you were.”

“Guardian Metel,” I greeted.

“Where have you been?” Metel asked.

“What?”

“Do you know how worried I was about you?!” Metel shouted.

“It's fine; you've confirmed that I'm safe, right? Anyway, I'm sure you can cast a spell, so can you create a path straight to Bahamut? Actually, I think it’s best if we decide on a location and make preparations ahead of time. *Ah!* Have you been studying it?” I asked.

“I didn’t have time for that. I still have… a bunch of questions I want to ask you,” Metel answered.

“I'm the one who organized the information, so you don’t have to worry so much. More importantly, I need you to help me. We don’t have time, but we have many things to do,” I requested.

I couldn't help but think that there was something wrong with Metel, and it was due to the fact that she was still worried about the Rift Museum despite the chaos around us.

At this point, I could say that she was obsessed.

Of course, people like her would always prioritize the satisfaction of their curiosity before anything else.

‘I’m glad I have someone who can lend a hand.’

I just had to take care of Bahamut in the next eight hours.

Actually, how many hours had it been?

“What exactly do you need help with?” Metel asked.

“…”

“Actually, before that…” Metel trailed off.

“…” “Father, one of your eyes…” Metel pointed at me.

“…”

'What about my eyes?'

“One of your eyes…” Metel repeated.

I quickly took out a hand mirror and checked my face.

“…”

'My eyes… '

“…”

“…”

‘Damn it… how dare you forget me, you bastard!’

It was returning to its original color.

CHAPTER 986
ALTANUS (23)

I looked at the hand mirror again, but nothing changed.

"…"

I stared at my face again at the thought that perhaps there was something wrong, but nothing changed. My golden eye, which was our bond and a symbol of the Regressor Instruction Manual, was returning to its original color.

My cool, odd eye disappeared.

The odd eye made me feel edgy as if I were a teenager, but I still cherished it a lot.

'I really liked it… '

"Father?"

"…"

'I've done so much for you. Damn it… how could you forget me?'

I couldn't help but think that way.

'You really forgot me?'

"…"

'You actually forgot me? You bastard. You really are useless.'

Of course, I understood why this happened.

I understood better than anyone that this was inevitable.

It wasn't that the Blue Guild had forgotten about me.

I would cease to exist, so saying that he had forgotten about me probably wasn't the best way to describe it.

The future had changed completely.

I wasn't even sure if Kim Hyun-Sung was still a regressor, as I had yet to decide whether to make him a regressor or not.

I didn't want to be separated from him, but I thought that taking care of everything in the first life was the right thing to do, but there was no guarantee that my plan would work out as I had intended.

If there was a variable, I could execute the round again… but if things did go the way I planned…

'It might get taken care of in the first life.'

The masked hero wouldn't exist in the first life, and it wouldn't be Altanus' Regressor anymore, but Altanus' Warrior. I was sure many things would change, but the basic framework would stay the same.

In other words, they had experienced the Continental War, the 27th Legion Summoning, the Outer Gods War, and other major events. Today, they were now raiding the Mole Saint's Cozy Sanctuary.

'I'll adjust the overall timeline… so that has to be it.'

Kim Hyun-Sung probably went through many incidents, but he was a hero who had grown stronger through my support. He was going to experience an incident unknown to me, and that incident would awaken him as the Sunset Warrior.

No, there was a chance that he would no longer be the Sunset Warrior.

'No, he has to be the Sunset Warrior.'

The sunset was extremely suitable for him, and I couldn't imagine him awakening as something else, so I needed to make sure that my plans would go smoothly.

Perhaps he'd awaken as the Sunset Holy Knight.

As soon as he was summoned, he'd start off as Altanus' Warrior.

It wouldn't be bad if he walked down the path of a holy knight.

Jung Ha-Yan and Park Deok-Gu would probably grow in a similar direction.

Ha-Yan could become a temple mage—a job that had never existed before, and Han Sora could become a black mage. It'd be great if they ended up working together upon experiencing hardships together.

Park Deok-Gu could grow in a similar way. If he was given a shield, he could follow the same path.

I still had no idea what would happen to Jo Hye-Jin. As for Kim Ye-Ri, she could become a Heretic Inquisitor along with Lee Chang-Ryeol.

Miss Hee-Young could become an archbishop or something.

I imagined them working as Altanus' Holy Knight Order instead of as members of the Blue Guild, and I nodded at that thought.

They'd look cool wearing the same special uniform that was different from the Templars.

The current overall timeline was similar, but it was a completely different world from the world I was familiar with. They hadn't really forgotten about me, and it wasn't a regretful situation, either, as I expected it to happen.

I knew this was going to happen, so I had to be clapping rather than feel disappointed.

The fact that my eye returned to its original color…

'Means the Altanus plan was a complete success, right?'

It hadn't been executed yet, but if the future proceeded at this rate and there were no errors or variables whatsoever, then I could say that it was a huge success.

'As expected from Lee Ki-Young.'

There were no openings in the plan, and the future was set.

‘I’d expect nothing less… ’

I know I was supposed to nod in joy, but I was angry.

I knew I had to do this, but I was feeling sad.

‘Shouldn’t he have resisted even a little bit?’

Wasn't there supposed to be a cliched moment where he'd try his best not to forget about me? There were still eight hours left, so wasn't it a bit too much for him to forget about me so early? Wasn't it too much for everything we had done so far to end up as if it had never happened at all?

Was it okay for everything to change this easily?

‘Shouldn’t you have endured it until the end?’

Wouldn’t it be beautiful to forget about me when there were only ten minutes left?

'Ha-Yan still remembers me, right? I’m sure Ji-Hye noona remembers me. Actually, I’m sure there’s at least one person who remembers me.'

I was surprised by the fact that I was having this thought, but it felt kind of miserable to be forgotten like this—wait, no…

“Bonds can be built again,” I muttered.

It wouldn't be between the Blue Guild and me, but it could be between Altanus and the Holy Knight Order. I still couldn’t think of a clear method, but I could find a way to get their memories back once the Blue Holy Knight Order had taken me out from the iron maiden.

It was only a possibility, but it was better than nothing.

“Father… are you okay?” Metel asked.

“…”

“Father.”

“What did you say?” I asked.

“Just now…”

“It’s nothing,” I told her.

“What? But…”

“You don’t have to worry. Why do you keep asking uncomfortable questions? You’re making me angry… More importantly, I should tell you about the future plan,” I told her.

“You said finding a place to meet Mr. Bahamut…” Metel reminded me.

“That’s right.”

I had taken care of both Draktaris and Templar Genny.

After taking care of Bahamut, my story would end with a beautiful farewell to Benigoa.

Naturally, I started walking with Metel.

I didn’t hear anything about a quest being completed, but I still needed to do my job.

“What should I—”

“You’re going to summon a demon,” I interrupted her.

“What?”

“Summon a demon,” I repeated.

“Excuse me?” Metel questioned.

“Why are you having a hard time understanding me? A demon summoning. I don’t have enough mana to hold a summoning ritual… so I’m going to need your help, Miss Metel. Actually, I won’t need just your help. It’ll be your job,” I explained.

“Are you serious right now?” Metel asked.

“Why wouldn’t I be serious?” I asked.

“…”

“You're a Rift Guardian, anyway. It doesn’t matter whether you summon a demon or their parents because it’s nothing compared to that rift being torn open.

"You'll never know what will come out of that rift. Aside from the program you’ll be learning from me, making a contract with a demon isn’t so bad. There are things I can’t tell you, but if you look at just the contract alone, you don’t have to worry about your soul getting taken away.

"In fact, there are some cases where they’re better than the gods and goddesses above, like Lucifer,” I told her.

“You…”

“I have an idea as to what you’re thinking right now, but it’s not what you think, Miss Metel. Haven't I shown you my wings? I’m embarrassed to say this myself, but I’m more of an angel than a demon,” I added.

“…”

“As soon as this is over, you just need to focus on stopping the rift. Except for taking care of the continent, you have many things to do here.

"If possible, we'll find a way to communicate with each other. Otherwise, I’ll give you this. Right now, this item isn't supposed to exist, so I can’t give you everything, but you’ll get what you want,” I continued.

“What do you mean by impossible?” Metel asked.

“It’s embarrassing to say this, but I might ascend,” I answered.

“What do you…”

“What I’m saying is I might become a god who is going to watch over the continent,” I told her.

“You’re crazy. How could you actually…”

I unfolded my wings because Metel and I were alone here.

‘The future is set.’

I did overdo it a bit, but my eye wasn't going to take on that hue anymore.

“…”

“…”

Obviously, Metel cast a dumbfounded gaze at me.

“Do you believe me now?” I asked.

Metel's mouth stayed open in a daze. Then, she cautiously asked, “Who… the hell are you?"

“Didn't I tell you when we first met? Incomprehensible things happen on the continent, like rifts. Who do *you* think I am? Do you remember the voice you heard back then? The voice that sounded like a divine message? It’s up to you to decide who *you* think I am,” I told her.

“…”

“Poor little sheep. I’m the God of Revival and Sacrifice. I traveled back in time because I found you pitiful and to take Lucifer's place," I said.

I was half-joking, but I could tell that she was confused. She was thinking that my ridiculous words could actually be true. I was sure she could feel it because she had received a quest from me before.

This incomprehensible item, the fact that I knew about the rift, my wings that gave no room for suspicion, and the holiness radiating from me. I was kind of sad that I had lost the ability to unleash light from my eye, but it was nothing more than an embellishment.

A saint with such radiant holy power was a shocking sight to everyone, and it would always make them think of something divine.

“Half of it is true,” I said.

“…”

“Do you believe me?” I asked.

“Yes…” Metel answered.

“Really?” I questioned.

“I’m not really sure… I’m confused as well… b-but… I feel like I should believe you,” Metel replied.

“That’s enough, and I’ll correct what I said before,” I said.

“Okay.”

“Do you remember the first time we met? I told you to forget about me,” I asked.

“Yes, you did say that…”

“I’ll take that back. Don’t forget about me,” I told her.

“…” “Don’t forget about me,” I repeated.

“Okay, I won’t forget,” Metel said.

Hearing her say that suddenly made me angry.

‘Damn it.’

It was all because Metel reminded me of Kim Hyun-Sung.

He told me the same thing as well.

‘Damn it.’

Now that I thought about it, I clearly told him not to forget about me.

‘This is why giving love is useless.’

His words suddenly popped into my head, making me gnash my teeth again.

'Do they really think that they can be happy without me? We'll just see about that.'

Despite that thought in mind, I wasn't sure either because I was the reason behind their mental illness, but…

'I still gave them many things, you know?'

It was true that I was the reason why they had one or two mental illnesses, but I gave them many things to compensate for that. The pros outweighed the cons.

'They're probably really unhappy right now.'

I wasn't there, so I was sure they couldn't even dream of having a normal life. I believed they were feeling nervous about the raid without me there.

Once I had become Altanus, I'd focus a little more on the well-being of those disgraceful fools, but I was convinced that they wouldn't be as happy as they were when I was by their side.

Right now, I was sure they were unhappier than me.

* * *

"*Hahahaha!*"

"*Hahahahaha!* Hey, Hyun-Sung bro! Is it okay to be joking around at a time like this? We're still in the middle of a raid!" Park Deok-Gu shouted.

"T-T-That's our motto. To always have fun…" Jung Ha-Yan chimed in.

"Ha-Yan noonim is right. Always have fun… that's a good motto. We're in a pinch right now, but… I'm sure we'll pull through this time as well. Like we always do," Park Deok-Gu said, nodding.

* * *

They were probably just as unhappy as me…

CHAPTER 987
ALTANUS (24)

Strictly speaking, it wasn’t an optimistic situation because the Mole Saint’s Cozy Sanctuary was far more difficult than I expected. It was more difficult than average unranked dungeons.

In addition to exceeding the expectations of dungeon researchers and power analysts, their plans had gone wrong as well.

This dungeon couldn't be cleared using ordinary methods, and I was sure everyone who joined the expedition group could feel that deep in their bones.

‘Simply defeating a boss monster isn't going to clear this dungeon.’

The dungeon monsters were spouting a bunch of nonsense, and there were incomprehensible anomalies as well. Above all, the spacetime inside the dungeon was fragmenting, scattering into what appeared like a mosaic.

It was such a strange sight that I had no idea how to describe it. The spacetime was repeatedly dividing and merging. It was an anomaly that not even people with PhDs or mages with degrees related to dungeons could understand.

It wasn't caused by mana nor holy power.

“I-If we… consider the continent as one big program, then the program is probably in the middle of getting fixed, as we can see from the division of the spacetime here,” Jung Ha-Yan said.

“Is that so?”

“I-I can’t… s-say for certain. I-I’ll have to investigate a little more… I-I don’t know what kind of example I can give…” Jung Ha-Yan replied.

“Miss Jung Ha-Yan, how about using magic as an example?” Han Sora suggested.

“*Ah!* R-Right. Thanks, Sora. S-So, you can think of it as a summoning spell, but you're not summoning a creature here. It’s more like a process of summoning an entire space.

"Actually, I don’t know if 'summoning' is the correct word… Maybe moving—no, you can think of it as releasing it. If that's not it, then maybe spacetime is being reversed, but… I can't be certain of it. I’ll need to do more research…” Jung Ha-Yan explained.

“You’ve looked into it enough, Miss Jung Ha-Yan. I think you’re *too* obsessed with that strange spacetime… and it’s worrying me…” Han Sora said.

“…”

“I-It’s fine, Sora. I’m not… obsessed… *Ah!* Anyway, what I want to say is that the strange space we’re standing and looking at is probably an unfamiliar place for us, Hyun-Sung oppa.

"It could be the place beyond the rift that we had seen at the Rift Museum… a different world in the same time period, or it could be in the past or in the future that is unknown to us. Of course, this is an assumption as well since this isn’t magic,” Jung Ha-Yan continued.

“Is it safe to assume that space and time are changing here?” Kim Hyun-Sung asked.

“Yes, probably…” she answered.

It could be a unique trick that the dungeon itself had or a side-effect that appeared after an extended period of time. It could be a crucial clue to clearing the dungeon.

“M-More importantly, have you not heard S-Saint Altanus’ voice, oppa?” Jung Ha-Yan asked.

That could be why they couldn't hear her voice…

“No. She… hasn’t said anything else yet. Is it the same for you?” Kim Hyun-Sung asked.

“Yes, it’s the same for me… D-Do you think she’s busy?” Jung Ha-Yan asked.

“Hey, did you make her mad again, Hyun-Sung bro?” Park Deok-Gu asked.

"…"

"That's a possibility," Sun Hee-Young chimed in.

"Hee-Young noonim agrees as well. You received a divine message to run away, but you overdid it and almost died. She didn't talk to you for a year. Even though she told you not to make useless offerings, you kept offering that strange bag of yours to her, and she ghosted you for a little over three months.

"Wait, she never even said that she liked that bag…" Park Deok-Gu pointed out.

"She never expresses it openly, but she's always happy about it. More importantly, didn't she… choose the offering herself?" Kim Hyun-Sung asked.

"Hey, you didn't have to give any offerings. All she said was that if you *wanted* to give her an offering, you could do it. Our leader sure adapts quickly to everything else… but when it comes to Saint Altanus, you're slow-witted things.

"Of course, it's the same for noonim…" Park Deok-Gu said.

"M-My faith is simply strong. And I'm not slow-witted…" Kim Hyun-Sung remarked.

"Everyone here has a strong faith. Everyone has gathered here under the guidance of Saint Altanus," Park Deok-Gu argued.

I nodded at the sight.

"It's the same for Ha-Yan noonim… me, Sora is kind of different… Hee-Ra noonim, Hye-Jin noonim, and all the new members… are here because of Saint Altanus. She's the one who gave us many things, and she changed us. The others have leveled up as well, but our leader was the one who changed the most," Park Deok-Gu added.

"Please refrain from being rude to our leader…" Jo Hye-Jin commented.

"Hey, you're too serious, Hye-Jin noonim. Don't you remember Saint Altanus telling you to loosen up a bit?" Park Deok-Gu asked.

"It's fine, Miss Hye-Jin. It's kind of embarrassing, but… at least we can laugh about it now," Kim Hyun-Sung told her.

“*Hahaha.*”

“*Hahahaha.*”

I saw everyone smiling.

They were probably talking about the time when we were in the tutorial dungeon.

It was the time when I crawled into a small space and hid.

It wasn’t exactly funny, but we were like a family—no, we were a family, so we could talk freely about it.

I was sure the gap between then and now was amusing.

It was embarrassing, but it was fun listening to them talk.

It made me feel good thinking that we could laugh about our embarrassing moments together because we were all family.

“We can just laugh about it now, but you were a completely different person back then when you were still hiding. Aren't you no longer the same weak bro that I know?

"Not being rude here; the thought just came into my head. Seeing how much you’ve grown, you really are the legendary Sunset Holy Knight. I feel overwhelmed just thinking about the things we experienced in the past,” Park Deok-Gu said.

“*Haha.* I never would have left if Saint Altanus hadn't called me out. While we’re on that topic… What about you, Mr. Deok-Gu? I remember you crying when you lost the shield that Saint Altanus had bestowed upon you…” Kim Hyun-Sung asked.

“T-That’s too… Don’t you think it’s unfair to bring that up?” Park Deok-Gu complained.

“You were. An embarrassment. Back then,” Kim Ye-Ri commented.

“Y-Y-Ye-Ri thinks that way as well?” Jung Ha-Yan stuttered.

“The holy knight who lost his holy relic. I wonder if someone like that actually exists.

She gave that to you herself, so Saint Altanus was so shocked, and she was at a loss for words. She didn't know what to say…" Kim Hyun-Sung added.

"…"

"I. Was. Really. Going to. Interrogate you. Mister Deok-Gu," Kim Ye-Ri said.

"*Hahahaha.*"

"If. Saint Altanus didn't care about you. You would have. Suffered from divine punishment. I don't know why. She cares about you so much. I really don't know," Kim Ye-Ri added.

"I-I also… thought that losing your holy relic… w-was a bit too much," Jung Ha-Yan mumbled.

"You, too, Ha-Yan noonim?" Park Deok-Gu said.

The pattern was similar each time, but it never failed to make me laugh. It had become a precious part of my daily life.

And that was when I heard a voice from afar…

"Are you talking about the past again?"

"Jung… Yeon noonim," Park Deok-Gu mumbled.

"Looks like our leader bullied my cute husband again. Also, darling, why are you still calling me noonim? We've been married for a while… Are you still embarrassed to call me darling or honey?" Hwang Jung-Yeon asked.

"…"

"You get embarrassed easily despite being a big boy…" Hwang Jung-Yeon added.

"*Ahem…*"

"Anyway… *ahem*… the food is ready," she said.

"Is it that time already?" Park Deok-Gu asked.

“What about… the others?” Hwang Jung-Yeon asked.

“Commander Jin said that something is off… so he’s been wandering around to investigate or something… I believe the Mercenary Queen is going to have a light meal. She must be dissatisfied about how we retreated in the previous battle,” Park Deok-Gu answered.

“I see.”

“*Ah!* The menu looks great. Today must be a special day. The Pope must’ve worked his magic…” Hwang Jung-Yeon said.

“Then, before we eat—”

“I know. I’ll call the other members,” Hwang Jung-Yeon interrupted Park Deok-Gu.

There was always this kind of event.

Only Altanus’ Holy Knight Order would do it before eating, before leaving on an expedition, before sleeping, and before doing anything.

The remaining members entered the tent as if they had been waiting for this.

Elena was a priest serving Elune, but she decided to live as a follower of Saint Altanus.

Miss Ah-Young was there along with Mr. Chang-Ryeol, who was now working as a Heretic Inquisitor. Alps and Belier, the rookie, gathered around. They started talking until everyone sat down.

They were in a difficult situation, but they smiled as if they were in a good mood.

“Is everyone here?” Kim Hyun-Sung asked.

“There’s… one person missing…”

“*Ah!* Miss Lian is coming.”

Others would find this strange, but I had long gotten used to this sight.

Many people thought this was a ceremony for the Knight's Order, so the people nearby left. They grabbed each other's hands and created a circle. Then, they closed their eyes and prayed.

They showed appreciation for the fact that Saint Altanus had chosen them and had given them hope during hopeless situations.

They chanted each word clearly and with indescribable feelings of gratitude.

"Thank you for always watching over the continent and us…"

"Please forgive the sins of those who serve you and those who don't serve you…"

"Those who don't serve you…"

"So that they shall follow your will…"

"Your will…"

I was sure everyone was thinking about it.

They were saying their prayers while thinking about Saint Altanus' words.

'My little lambs.'

"Please…"

'Actually… my babies… my children. I want you to be happy.'

"…"

'I want you to treat each other like family and support each other. Give each other strength.'

"Please…"

'Things can get tough sometimes. You will find yourself in a pinch, but I always believe in you. If everyone walks on the same path, you'll be able to overcome any trial. So my children… empathize with each other; laugh and cry with each other.

'Remember that I—the worthless one—am always with you.'

"…"

"O Altanus."

'I want to see you smile, my children. I want you to enjoy your ordinary days and the life bestowed upon you. Even if you experience hardships and trials, I want you to overcome them with a smile. I want you to value and enjoy the gifts I have given you… '

"Thank you as always."

'Keep smiling…

"T-T-Thank you as always, Saint Altanus. T-Thank you very much… for watching over us."

'Keep… having fun. That's what comforts me, and it is my wish.'

"…"

'I hope you don't forget my words. I hope you'll always carry my words with you. I hope you'll always carry my sincerity in your hearts, and I hope you'll never forget that I love you.'

"…"

'Don't forget… ever… again.'

"Yes, O God. We'll never forget."

"…" "We'll never… ever forget."

"…"

"We will never forget."

CHAPTER 988
ALTANUS (25)

"..."

"..."

"Liar."

I[1] would never forget.

"No, you're going to forget."

'That's not possible. How can I forget?'

"You forgot."

'That can't be, Mr... '

"It hurts."

'What?'

"It hurts... It really... really... hurts... I gave up everything for you..."

"..."

"I thought you guys would remember me..."

"..."

"I resent you guys sometimes. It happens rarely, but I resent you guys so much. The emptiness... pain... and waiting wasn't painful for me, Hyun-Sung. Our time wasn't short... but I still had fun. But... I sometimes feel like this outcome is really cruel, especially when I waited such a long time for it."

'What do you mean?'

“There are times when I laugh, but when the day is over, it becomes painful again. I thought… I thought there would be a place for me. I thought you would make a place for me… That’s what I thought, but you didn’t.”

'Mr—I… '

“I think it’s all your fault. I think you made me this way. You changed me… and eventually abandoned me.”

'I didn’t. I… '

“You abandoned me. I never abandoned you. You forgot about me, and you made me feel miserable.”

It felt like a dark shadow was suppressing me.

A shapeless hand was climbing up me, lingering around my neck.

“I did it for you… but you abandoned me.”

The shapeless hand was tightening its grip on my neck. It wasn’t strong, but I couldn’t breathe. I became stiff, and I couldn’t move. I couldn’t shake off the shapeless hand, even though it seemed like I could easily shake it off.

“You… You… Heuk… heuuuk…”

“*Heuk… heuk…* T-That’s not true! That’s not… *Heuk*… not true.”

“…”

“No… that’s not true…”

I was covered in sweat. The moment I got up, I immediately looked for my rosary.

I touched my neck, and the familiar feeling made me feel relieved, so I instantly exhaled. My breathing was unstable, and I couldn't stop breathing heavily.

"Things can get tough sometimes. You will find yourself in a pinch, but I always believe

in you. If everyone walks on the same path, you'll be able to overcome any trial. So my children… empathize with each other, laugh and cry with each other.

"Remember that I—the worthless one—am always with you."

"…"

"…"

"I want to see you smile, my children. I want you to enjoy your ordinary days and the life bestowed upon you. Even if you experience hardships and trials, I want you to overcome them with a smile."

I recalled Saint Altanus' words and chanted them.

"Saint Altanus will always be by my side," I mumbled.

"…"

"Saint Altanus will always be by my side," I repeated.

I calmed down slowly, and my tumultuous emotions were stabilizing as well.

"Saint Altanus," I said.

It was a strange dream. It was a really, *really* strange dream.

"It really was a—"

"Leader, it's Jo Hye-Jin. Did something happen?" Jo Hye-Jin asked.

"…" "Leader?" Jo Hye-Jin asked.

"It's nothing, Miss Hye-Jin. I just had a strange dream… I'll head out now," I replied.

"It's still early, Leader. You can—"

"No, it's fine. I have work I need to take care of anyway. Is… Miss Ha-Yan sleeping?" I asked.

“She’s in the middle of her research concerning that strange spacetime…” Jo Hye-Jin answered.

“What?”

“After today's meeting, she said that she needed to look into it again… and she hasn’t left her spot since then,” Jo Hye-Jin added.

It wasn’t unusual. Jung Ha-Yan would often stay up all night to do her research.

“It’d be nice if there’s nothing out of the ordinary…” I commented.

“Miss Sora also expressed her worries. I don’t know why, but she sometimes cries by herself,” Jo Hye-Jin said.

Perhaps it was because I had a disturbing dream, but I felt uncomfortable, so I tightened my grip around my rosary again and looked at the mirror.

I was frowning a bit, and my expression looked so serious as if I had seen a ghost. This wasn’t what Saint Altanus wanted. I forced my trembling lips to smile.

After reciting another prayer, I could feel my expression turning to normal.

When I walked out, I saw a familiar face.

“I’m sorry for worrying you, Miss Hye-Jin,” I said.

“Did you have a nightmare?” Jo Hye-Jin asked.

“Sounds like you heard everything from out here. Looks like Mr. Deok-Gu will tease me again,” I said.

“As the leader, you need to scold him from time to time. Mr. Deok-Gu doesn’t seem like he knows how to distinguish between private and public matters. I can't believe he made such comments when the new members are around—”

“Isn’t it okay since it makes Saint Altanus happy? I didn’t think I would say this myself, but as you already know, Saint Altanus—”

“Yes, yes, I know, Leader. Don’t be too serious… but I’m not *that* serious,” Jo Hye-Jin

interrupted me.

Jo Hye-Jin looked down slightly, looking a bit heartbroken.

“S-S-So… you sounded really scared… Did you dream about the time you were in the tutorial dungeon?” Jo Hye-Jin asked.

Her statement made me smile and chuckle. “*Pfft.*”

“…”

“*Hahaha.*” I laughed.

“I’m sorry, Leader,” Jo Hye-Jin said.

“No, it’s fine. It was funny,” I told her.

It was more like the comment she made was funny rather than the joke itself.

She sounded awkward, but she had clearly mustered the courage to say it. She had to have decided to become brave upon realizing that I was in bad condition. I was happy for some reason. I finally understood why Saint Altanus told us to always cry and laugh together as well as empathize with each other.

“*Ah!* The dream wasn’t about the tutorial dungeon,” I answered.

“Then…”

“I’m not sure. It was clearly…” I paused.

“…”

“I-I-I… don't really remember,” I told her.

It wasn’t an excuse. I really couldn't remember it. I tried to remember it, but for some reason, I couldn’t remember anything about it. The shapeless hand and that voice—that was all I could remember.

“*Ah!* I experience that from time to time,” Jo Hye-Jin commented.

“It was so vivid… that I thought I would never forget it… but it was completely erased from my mind after talking to you, Miss Hye-Jin. I’m not really sure, but I was clearly in pain… anxious, and scared,” I told her.

“I think it’s because you’ve been really stressed lately,” Jo Hye-Jin said.

“That’s a possibility. Saint Altanus—”

“This isn’t the first time she hasn’t said anything for a while, so don’t worry so much… Once we conquer this dungeon, I’m sure she’ll be happy and she’ll start talking again. She’s always been like that,” Jo Hye-Jin reassured.

“I agree with you, but… no… I’m sure she’ll be happy,” I agreed with her.

And that was when I heard a scream. “*AAAAH!*”

I placed my hand on the sheath of my sword, but I chuckled when I recognized the owner of the voice. “*Pfft!*”

“*Haha…*”

“Looks like… Mr. Deok-Gu had a nightmare as well,” I commented.

“I agree,” Jo Hye-Jin said.

“*Heuk… Heuuung…*” Park Deok-Gu cried.

“…”

“Hyuuuuung… *Kgggggh… kgh… Heuuung…*”

“…”

“*Keugh… Hiccup… Heuuung…*”

“Honey? H-Honey? Mr. Deok-Gu.”

“*Huh? Ah…*”

“W-W-What’s wrong?” I asked.

"*Huh?*"

"Did you have a nightmare?" I asked.

"*Uh…* I…"

I remained quiet and was worried about the voice coming from inside the tent.

"What kind of dream—"

"I'm not sure… I don't really remember… Were you talking in your sleep or something?" Park Deok-Gu asked.

Naturally, I made eye contact with Jo Hye-Jin.

The first time could be a coincidence, but the second time was different.

"…"

"…"

"I'll be right back. Dispatch the rangers and examine the camp. Dispatch the investigation team as well to address this issue. The chances are low, but a mare could be behind this, so dispatch the Holy Knights as well. This is the top priority," I ordered.

"Okay."

"And isolate the people who are showing the same symptoms," I added.

"Yes, sir."

'Their minds?'

I looked up at the ceiling and saw the spacetime emitting a buzzing noise while splitting and splicing.

It was reasonable for me to think that there was some kind of curse or debuff here that affected one's mind. Park Deok-Gu and I, as well as the others who had nightmares that they couldn't remember, could be under the same curse or debuff. A

specific monster could be behind it, but it was most likely the work of the strange spacetime above us.

I had to look around first and if there really were a mage…

'They managed to infiltrate the safe zone?'

I checked the other camps, but I didn't hear any loud noises.

There was a high chance that the Commander of the Republic was talking about this when he mentioned that so-called "strange feeling." The camp was lit, so he probably decided to stay up late to finish his work.

I knew it was a rude thing to do, but I decided to walk to his camp.

"Commander," I said.

"What brings you here this late? It's rude…" Commander Jin said.

"I'm sorry, but there's something I have to ask you… Regarding the strange feeling you had before…" I paused.

"…"

"…"

"I was actually going to tell you about it…" Commander Jin said.

"Go ahead," I said.

"There were quests," Commander Jin said.

"What?"

"From the first floor of the basement level up to here, I found dozens of quests," Commander Jin answered.

"Quests?"

"Some of the quests have rewards. Take a look. It's a rare potion. I guarantee there

isn’t an item better than this out there. I asked the alchemists of the Republic for their opinion, but—”

“Regarding the strange space…” I interrupted Commander Jin.

“That’s also being investigated,” Commander Jin answered.

I started moving again.

“…”

“…”

“Disgusting lapdogs of Altanus. You’re still rude as usual.”

I heard him criticize me, but I couldn't care less nor apologize. My heart was pounding, but that was probably just me.

“S-Something is strange,” I said.

How come I couldn't hear Saint Altanus’ voice? Had something happened to her?

“Miss Ha-Yan. Miss Ha-Yan,” I called out.

“Hyun-Sung oppa…?” Jung Ha-Yan answered. She stretched her hand out toward the strange spacetime from afar, and Han Sora was clinging to her.

‘What’s going on?’

I ran as fast as I could, but I wasn’t getting closer to them.

They were getting farther and farther away, and I felt myself getting whisked away to somewhere else. It felt like the world was spinning. The scenery before me was spinning, and I heard strange screams and cries.

One of the strange voices was familiar, and I felt like I heard it in one of my dreams before. No, I was sure I heard this voice before. The voice sounded extremely heartbroken, so I immediately covered my ears to avoid getting beguiled.

“What the…”

'Where am I?'

“What the… hell is this…”

I found myself inside a vast cavern filled with artificial lights.

There was an iron maiden in the middle of the cavern, and it was emitting a radiant light.

“What… is that?”

---

1. Kim Hyun-Sung’s POV ☜

CHAPTER 989
DREAM

It was an unusual sight. The fact that I managed to find myself here was unusual as well, but the sight before me was even more unusual than that. It was like I was staring at a kaleidoscope of artificial lights.

The scene reflected before my eyes was a desolate space, but one thing I was sure of was that all of this looked extremely holy. It wasn't the same as the temples outside, but this place felt like a temple.

I saw an altar of unknown purpose and props that looked like they were used for religious ceremonies. That was all I could see in this empty space, but the place felt holy rather than empty.

There weren't murals or statues depicting legendary figures, and the lights looked like decorations that were used to make this space stand out.

The iron maiden stood tall, and it was the strangest prop among all the props here.

Why was a torture device like that standing in the center of this place?

No matter how much I thought about it, it wasn't a normal sight.

To make things worse, it was releasing a radiant light, making my jaw drop without realizing it. The artificial light around it was different. The radiant light was strangely warm and cozy. Despite what it looked like on the outside, this space was extremely…

'Oppressive and frightening.'

It was probably because this was a brand-new sight to me.

I unknowingly stepped back and heard a *splash*.

It was a feeling I felt many times on the battlefield, and it was a nauseating feeling.

When I looked down, I saw a red puddle on the ground. I noticed it just then—the large cavern was covered in blood. The floor was so red that I'd believe it if someone were to say that I was staring at a shallow lake of blood. Interestingly, the air had no rusty smell, but I still couldn't understand why it took me so late to notice all the blood.

In addition, the air smelled sweet.

Splish, splash, splash…

This was all I could hear in this place.

'P-pause and think carefully about all this. Don't get too worried and just think about all the possibilities, as that was Saint Altanus' advice. Think again and again. Once you've thought it through, you can then make your move.'

"Where… am I?"

I suddenly found myself here, so I probably got myself caught up in a trap, or I could have discovered an easter egg. If I were right, then it was highly likely that the other expedition members would soon arrive here.

'A hidden boss.'

The hidden boss was probably inside that iron maiden.

It seemed different from the other bosses we had encountered so far here at the Mole Saint's Cozy Sanctuary, but it didn't mean that the expedition group had no way of releasing the seal.

If I were to open that iron maiden, a hidden boss would most likely appear, and the raid would begin. Technically, I had to wait for the other members or find a way to bring them to this room. I was strong, yes, but a raid with no information and comrades was a bit too much for me.

I was sure that was the right thing to do, and Saint Altanus would agree with me. Despite that, I couldn't help but keep walking toward the place that was definitely dangerous.

I could hear a faint voice from it, and it sounded like the voice I often heard in my

dreams. Moreover, the radiant light from the iron maiden spread like smoke and transformed into humanoid figures.

It was an interesting sight. The lights were moving and creating figures on their own. The figures moved and spoke as if they were in a play. They talked with each other, cried, and laughed.

At some point, figures made out of light were all around me.

"Mr… do you recognize me?"

"No."

"What?"

"I don't think I remember you because it's been so long since we've seen each other."
"Uh."

"I'm joking."

"I'm sorry. I was… really—"

"No, you don't have to be sorry. I already know how busy you are… and more importantly, I know how important training is. You don't need to stay here. You don't even have time to talk… It's time to go back to your training. Don't worry about me and go back. I'm fine, Mr. Hyun-Sung."

The two were talking. One of them was being sarcastic, while the other was struggling. Interestingly, one of the figures resembled me a lot. No, I heard my name, so I was sure it was me. A figure who looked like me was talking to a faceless figure.

"Um, Mr… I got a really rare item from the auction house today. It's not the Chanelia Hermes you've been waiting for, but it was made by a leatherworker named Louisgucci…"

"…"

"I'm sorry. There aren't many decent items on sale these days…"

"Whoo…"

“…”

“…”

“Mr. Hyun-Sung, how long has it been since you took a break from the guild tasks? How were you able to afford this bag?”

“…”

“Don’t you think this is a bit much?!”

“…” “I’m sick and tired of it.”

It looked like I was looking at my ordinary daily life. We'd exchange gifts and…

“It’s the Chanelia Hermes.”

“It’s not bad. My display case will finally be filled.”

“I’m glad you like it.”

We'd eat together.

‘How is it?”

“It’s not bad.”

Or we'd just have ordinary conversations…

“I was kind of surprised when I received a griffon as a gift.”

“Ah, I got it when I was returning from the Capital. I was worried about whether you’d like it or not. I didn’t think you’d like it that much, and I also didn’t think that you enjoyed festivals and festival-related items. I'm honestly kind of relieved. At the time, Miss Hye-Jin—”

“Hahaha. Is that true?”

“I was really surprised when you suddenly said you were going to appoint her as the secretary.”

“I-I’m sorry about that.”

They were stories about us riding our griffons together or going shopping. We’d drink tea, open festivals, and laugh. However, I wasn’t the only figure made by the light. It’d be nice if it was just all in my head, but it felt like all the Holy Knights were here.

“*I-I-It’s been a while since we went on a date.”*

“That’s because we haven’t had the chance to go on one. Let’s do whatever you want to do today.”

“R-Really?’

“Yeah.”

Jung Ha-Yan…

“O-O-Oppa, I love you.”

“I love you too, Ha-Yan.”

Park Deok-Gu…

“Hey, you should exercise. You should worry about yourself before worrying about me. Did you stay up last night as well? You should get some sleep.”

“…”

“Come on, let’s go eat. Don’t tell me you’re going to eat alone today. I know you’re busy, but you should at least fulfill your basic needs.”

Jo Hye-Jin…

“You have no right to say something like that, Miss Hye-Jin.”

“Excuse me?”

“You must not remember our last chess game. I recall you losing without having the chance to do anything.”

“248 wins and 246 losses. Based on the score, I obviously-”

“Why do you even remember that? You just need to remember the most recent score. Who lost three games and was annihilated again?”

“I asked you to play after that, but you ran away.”

“I'd be playing with an inferior player, so I couldn't get in the mood to play. I declined as a way of telling you to improve a little more. I didn’t run away. Obviously, I don’t want to play with a rookie. P-Pfft!”

Sun Hee-Young…

“The tea time is nice.”

“I’m grateful… you think that way…”

“It’s normally really loud, so I need quiet times like these. As you already know…”

“Yes, I understand what you’re saying, Miss… It doesn’t happen every time… but sometimes it’s just…”

“I’m glad we think the same thing. Haha. Is this apple tea?”

“Yes, I have other teas as well. Would you like to try them?”

I heard voices everywhere.

They gathered at a large table and talked, drank, and sang.

They were rowdy, and it was probably because of the dancing Ye-Ri.

They seemed to be really enjoying themselves.

They laughed while clapping, clinked glasses, and started talking about the things they normally talked about. Miss Elena, who was sipping on her cup, looked like she was talking about the Elf Kingdom with Yoo Ah-Young.

I took a step forward, and the scenery changed.

The faceless figure was on the terrace with me and was drinking coffee while watching people train. I was sure that was part of their daily life. They'd raise their hand slightly to greet people and call out their names. They'd go out to eat with other people and have conversations that I couldn't quite understand.

When I stepped forward once more, the scenery changed again.

I could see the sunset. I wasn't sure where I was, but I was looking at two people who were staring at the sunset. I didn't know what they were talking about, but the faceless figure seemed like they were smiling.

I stepped forward, and the scenery changed again.

"Y-You'll… become a hero."

"…"

"You'll save everyone, the continent, and me."

"…"

I stepped forward, and the scenery changed again.

"You'll grow strong enough to sacrifice yourself for others, and in the end, you'll be saved."

I stepped forward, and I saw the iron maiden.

The iron maiden was crying tears of blood.

Blood spilled out of it as I stared at the figure that the light had created.

I knew I wasn't supposed to open it, and I knew that this was a risky adventure.

However… my hand reached out toward it, even though I knew that I couldn't do this.

I was reacting to it without realizing it.

I put some strength into my arms, and I opened it without any hiccups.

A creaking noise echoed, and the door seemed to open automatically.

“Who is it…”

There was a figure whose figure was covered in a red hue. The figure's body was riddled with holes in a variety of sizes, and there was blood flowing out of the holes.

It was such a horrible sight that I couldn’t describe it with words. I thought I had witnessed all sorts of disasters and grisly scenes after years of living in this ruthless continent, but the sight before me was such a cruel sight that it couldn’t be compared to those things.

I couldn’t see clearly, and my head felt like it was spinning.

“Who… the hell… are you…”

Squelch, squelch, squelch…

I could hear the thorns falling off their figure.

It felt like the grotesque noises were telling me about how long it had been since the thorns had pierced their figure. The figure fell forward weakly. I tried to catch them, but I took a step backward. There was a *thud*, and they fell to the ground.

The figure rolled on the ground as if it were a puppet that had lost its strings.

‘Y-Y-You’ll… become a regressor.’

And…

‘A good ending awaits you.’

“*Ahhh…”*

‘I’m going to give you that kind of future.’

“*AAAAAH…!*”

‘…’

"*AAAAAH!!!*"

'You'll be happy, my regressor.'

"..."

'Kim Hyun-Sung.'

"..."

CHAPTER 990
THE END OF THE SOCIAL GATHERING (1)

'What happened?'

Kabooooooooom!

"Damn it… damn it! There's another explosion…"

'From where… '

I[1] heard complaints mixed with explosions from all directions.

"Damn it! I told you that I was going to leave this place! The Underground Temple—"

"Please follow the procedure!" a soldier interrupted.

"You think I supported the Underground Temple so I can receive this kind of treatment?! You have to tell us what's going on right now! How much longer do we need to feel anxious?" Deliha complained.

"We're still finding out—"

"That's what you said earlier! How much longer do we need to wait, Captain Bahamut?! Captain Bahamut! Are you listening to me?" Deliha questioned.

"The Captain is… I'll answer in his place. There's a black mage who made a contract with a high-ranking demon—"

"Everyone already knows that, but you don't even know whether there really is a black mage or not. If there were a black mage hiding here, then tell me why you haven't found them yet! Move aside. I need to talk to Bahamut myself…" Deliha demanded.

I started getting a headache.

“I’m sorry, but for your safety—”

“Are you sure this place is safe? I’m asking whether following your rules is really going to be safe for us or not. If leaving isn’t an option… then bring soldiers from the aboveground,” Deliha requested.

Actually, I experienced this many times before. Simply put, a terrorist black mage had infiltrated and attacked the Underground Temple. This had never happened in the Underground Temple, but they had experienced something like this.

It seemed like this incident was being handled.

They were evacuating the important figures from aboveground and were minimizing the number of casualties and those wounded. The explosions were decreasing, and the Templars were moving around to find the black mage.

The top priority was protecting the fleshly body of Saint Altanus, who was an important being of the Underground Temple. We couldn’t put down our guard just yet, but it was undeniable that things were looking optimistic. Despite that, I was puzzled.

I couldn't calm down at all, and there was this strange anxiety gripping my entire being.

‘The Priest of Prophecy… ’

I was convinced that it was because of him—no, it was more like the words he said to me. His warning was making me feel anxious.

‘You must stay away from that power.’

His voice echoed nonstop in my head.

‘I can’t tell you now… but you must stay away from that power.’

I couldn’t understand what he was saying.

“…”

He was… He was an interesting person. He was honest and more devoted than any

other priest. When it came to theology, he'd happily mutter things only sages would say. It felt like his knowledge was endless, but he wasn't a fan of showing that off.

It felt like he was actually trying to hide it.

It was the same for his actions.

His being exuded elegance that one would only see from royal families and nobles, but it looked like he was trying to restrict himself. He also wasn't afraid to sacrifice himself for others. He was a saint who thought about others before himself. He was badly hurt by that pitch-black flame, but he was worried about the tiny burn on my hand.

Moreover, he treated those who were unfortunate enough to get caught up in the explosion nonstop, without thinking about himself. His eyes were filled with warmth and affection all throughout the ordeal.

It was like he was carrying all the pain and sadness of the world. There was sadness mixed in his gaze whenever he looked at me. He approached me as if… he knew everything.

'No… Mr. Bahamut… please… don't accept that power… '

What was he talking about? What was going to happen soon?

The Underground Temple… No, what did the Priest of Prophecy and I get involved in?

"Corruption…"

"…"

"…"

It didn't make sense at all.

I had lived my entire life serving the Goddess, so it wouldn't make sense for me to end up getting corrupted. However, I did not question the words of the Priest of Prophecy.

Actually, it was impossible to question him. I saw an illusion; it was fleeting, but I was sure I saw his true colors. His light was so radiant that it was blinding, and one of his eyes was holy. He also had wings that looked like they were capable of embracing all the sins in the world.

A Messenger of the Goddess—no, I would believe it if someone were to say that he was the Incarnation of the Goddess. Perhaps… the things that were happening right now… were all related to the future that the Priest of Prophecy had seen.

That was the conclusion I ultimately reached…

"I'm… going to assess the situation myself," I said.

"Mr. Bahamut!"

"Captain Bahamut!"

'Where is he?'

He had the answer.

'Priest of Prophecy… '

And that was when I realized it…

"You idiot…"

I felt stupid for not realizing it until now.

"Mr. Bahamut, the saint… has something to say…"

"Tell them that I'm busy," I told them.

"What? But… they said it was really urgent."

"I'll come back as soon as possible," I said.

The first explosion that occurred. If that was targeted at either the Priest of Prophecy or me, then the target was clear. I couldn't help but think that I was missing something more important than protecting Saint Altanus.

I got up and moved. I heard voices behind me, but I couldn’t pay attention to them.

‘Is he with Father Draktaris?’

If that weren't the case… If he ended up getting harmed while I was looking away… If the hands of evil had gotten a hold of him… would Templar Genny be able to protect him?

‘No way… ’

The worst-case scenario popped into my head.

I imagined losing the continent's brand-new ray of hope and radiant light.

‘Shit.’

While I was mindlessly running around the temple, a voice echoed in my head.

[Come…]

“…”

[Come here.]

“Am I… Am I going crazy?”

[Come here.]

I wasn’t sure who the voice belonged to, but it sounded like it was piercing my mind.

Lucifer? No, it could be the Priest of Prophecy, or I could just be hearing things.

My steps became slow, but I was moving toward the voice. I thought perhaps I was being possessed by something, but this was probably the best choice.

[Please… Please come here.]

“Damn it…”

I had no other choice. I had no one else to rely on other than the voice I was hearing

from somewhere. The scenery eventually changed. I wasn't sure whether this was the right way to describe it, but my surroundings were getting darker and darker.

The Underground Temple was in a mess, and the surroundings were getting darker and darker as if something was blotting out even the slightest ray of light.

Lucifer's broken statue was scattered all over the floor.

I was furious at the sight, but I pushed myself to pick up the pace.

When my hand unconsciously touched the nearest wall, I felt something sticky.

'Blood.'

Naturally, I took out my weapon. I had no idea what was calling for me, but it was undeniable that I had to be there. I was sure my surroundings were filled with corpses, and I knew because I could smell the thick stench of blood.

I was sure this place had become pandemonium itself.

I muttered Lucifer's name and started walking again. I couldn't see anything because it was so dark.

Eventually, I saw a faint light from afar, and I ran fast with my weapon out.

[Please come.]

"Who are you?" I asked.

[Please come here.]

"Who the hell…"

"*Ack…*"

I heard a faint voice.

'The Priest of Prophecy.'

"I will never… ever… let things… go your way…"

"…"

My ears were keen, but I couldn't hear the voice clearly.

Unlike the clear voice that was in my head just moments ago, I was sure this voice belonged to the Priest of Prophecy.

— Don't think that things will go your way, Priest of Prophecy.

"I…"

I saw the Priest of Prophecy with his pure white wings. The radiant light from his entire being was vanquishing the pitch-black darkness.

He was holding a holy torch in one hand and a mirror in the other. They were items that looked like holy relics, and they were unleashing a radiant light that pushed back against the encroachment of the darkness.

"Priest…"

I was going to call out to him, but I took another look at him and saw that some of his wings had been torn off, and he was covered in blood. Above all… one of his eyes was closed, and blood was flowing out from the closed eye. The Priest of Prophecy's eye—

"Mr. Bahamut?" he called out.

—met my eyes.

"I…"

"W-W-why are you… here, Mr. Bahamut?" he questioned.

I had to act first. I wasn't sure about the opponent's identity, but…

"Don't move!"

— *Hahahaha…* The one with the demon's seed has walked here on his own!

"The demon's seed?" I repeated.

"*Kgh…*"

The moment I took a step forward, a wave of darkness sprang up from the ground. The darkness devoured everything nearby, and it threatened to devour the radiant light of the Priest of Prophecy.

"You must stay there… Mr… *Ugh*… Bahamut…" mumbled the Priest of Prophecy.

"Priest of Prophecy… Y—Your eye…" I pointed out.

"I'm okay… with these eyes now," said the Priest of Prophecy.

"What happened… to your wings…" I asked.

"Later… I'll explain everything later. I'm sorry, Mr. Bahamut. I'm really… really… sorry. I didn't… want you to see me… like this…" replied the Priest of Prophecy.

He looked anguished.

— The demon's seed is here. *Mwahahaha!* The one with the demon's seed has finally arrived.

"I'll… protect you, Mr. Bahamut," the Priest of Prophecy said to me.

I was so bewildered, shocked, and confused by what was going on that I couldn't quite keep up with the situation.

However, the puzzle pieces were falling into place, and I felt like I finally knew the identity of the Priest of Prophecy, why I was here, and the meaning of his prophecy.

"The demon's… seed…"

The demon's seed was inside me.

---

1. Bahamut's POV ☜

CHAPTER 991
THE END OF THE SOCIAL GATHERING (2)

'The demon's seed.' He probably thought that nonsense was inside him. *'I'm really glad that he's an idiot.'*

Actually, he wasn't an idiot.

It was more like my[1] work was just too excellent.

This was the result of my painstaking efforts. The props were perfect, the story flowed smoothly, and I finally managed to sow the seed that I had planted in the beginning. This situation was only made possible because everything had gone according to plan.

For a split second, my wings and golden eye had captivated him. The small event that took place on the terrace wasn't part of my plan, but it had become an indispensable and delicious ingredient for this dish.

'I'm sure he's fallen for it.'

It didn't matter whether he thought of me as the Incarnation of the Goddess or the Avatar of the Goddess. Personally, I wanted to be known as an angel who had abandoned his position and descended to protect the continent.

An angel who couldn't ignore the pain of the humans he loved so much.

'I'm an angel who has fallen from the heavens like a meteor.'

Of course, the angel didn't love the continent at first. Many things had happened before I—the treasure of heaven—had decided to descend, but I had no choice but to skip all that because I didn't have enough time.

Of course, it was an important setting as well.

My story started on a relaxing day in the heavens. I happened to look down on the

world down below and clapped my eyes on a Templar who had devoted his body and heart to Lucifer.

The sight kickstarted a small change in my life; I cried, laughed, and empathized with his adventures, and I watched over him nervously.

It was a grand and legendary story, and it all started with that small change. I couldn't stand by and watch him get corrupted. I couldn't watch the continent fall as well. As always, it was a touching story that would end with me sacrificing myself.

A story that one would see in a drama, and as I said, it was a very important setting. It was proven by the shocked face of the man before him. I couldn't even imagine how he was feeling upon finding out the secret about himself that even he didn't know about.

“Don’t… Don’t surrender to evil, Mr. Bahamut,” I begged.

“Father…”

He probably didn’t even have the luxury to think about that.

He probably wanted to run toward the injured angel and save him, but this wasn’t a battle of brute force.

This was a battle between holy and evil.

A fight between an angel and a great demon. There was an invisible and intangible energy. It was a fight between those who had transcended, and it was a battle of morality. Of course, Bahamut couldn’t understand the fight at all.

I raised the holy torch in my hand, and the radiant light pushed back the darkness.

I reflected the light with my mirror and stopped the darkness' encroachment.

Of course, the darkness was still there, and it was struggling for supremacy over this place against the radiant light.

The light and the darkness’ fight over this place was more intense than any other battles. Well, this was just an illusion, so it would be okay for me to manipulate the light and make it look kind of cool.

Hundreds, no, thousands of dark arrows targeted my pure white wings. In response, I raised the mirror of light, and a large shield of light manifested, consuming the dark arrows.

A dark scythe manifested afterward, and I swung my holy torch toward it. The collision generated fragments of light that fell from the torch and landed on the darkness encroaching on the floor.

It was a spectacular virtual battle that couldn't be matched by cheap action scenes. I was sure that the 4D graphics were realistic enough to make Bahamut cry, and it was proven by how he wasn't even moving. He was staring dumbfoundedly at the scene.

'Belial, this doesn't look like a ridiculous fight, does it?'

[It's not, you disgusting angel. Humans are naturally afraid of the unknown. It's true that this human named Bahamut has transcended, but at the end of the day, he's still human. If he's a human worthy of being on the same level as us, he wouldn't see this as a joke. Those on a higher level won't expect this kind of joke, and…]

'So you're certain this looks convincing?'

[I guarantee it.]

If I were to compare Bahamut to a caveman who had just witnessed something new, it would be a bit too much, but he actually looked like that.

— The seed of evil is going to bloom! *Hahaha!* The destruction of the continent begins today! In this place!

"Y-You think I'll let that happen?" I stuttered.

— Struggle all you want. You're nothing but an angel who has abandoned yourself for the continent! Simply hilarious! *Hahahaha!* It's so hilarious! An angel is actually trying to protect a human with the demon's seed! *Hahahaha!*

"*Ugh…"*

[He's even afraid of you getting hurt. There is nothing more fun than this.]

'We're in sync.'

— Struggle all you want, but it's too late. I can see it, you weak angel. The demon's seed is already eating away at you!

"That's not… That's not true, Mr Bahamut!" I shouted.

A curtain of darkness manifested as if it were proving that the demon lord was right.

Bahamut seemed afraid of the current situation. I noticed he hadn't moved an inch, and it was understandable. He was the only one who couldn't feel anything, as the seed of evil growing inside his body was only affecting me.

He flinched at the intense sight, and his slight movement affected me immediately

'Huh? You moved! Did you just flinch?'

'Then, that will break one of my wings, damn it. I'm dying because of the demonic energy that you're unleashing.'

A wave of energy burst out of Bahamut, shattering one of my remaining wings.

"*Ack!*" I screamed.

- *Hahahaha!* What a pitiful sight, you foolish angel. I can't understand it. No matter how much I think about it, you're a fool that I truly cannot understand.

"*Ugh…*"

I needed to show him an aerial battle as well.

I had wings, so it would be a good idea to show him my fancy flying skills.

'Ah, damn it.'

Unfortunately, this wasn't going my way. While trying to dodge the claws of darkness, I flapped my wings the wrong way, which ended up in me falling to the ground. What comforted me was the fact that the scene looked pretty good and natural.

[It was natural.]

'It was natural.'

I looked so pitiful that I ended up creating a cool scene. I got up and staggered. My injuries were so bad that I looked like I was supposed to be in a coma right now, but I forced myself to stand up.

I was trembling like an aspen tree, and it was all because I was scared as well.

My opponent was a demon lord, and there was a massive gap between our power. I could struggle for as long as I wanted, but the gap between our power wouldn't narrow at all. The holy torch was dying out, and the Goddess' Mirror was slowly losing its power. Despite that, the angel… who loved humans and the continent stood up.

"R-Run, Father Lee Ki-Young. I'm okay…" Bahamut stammered.

'I can't hear you.'

"Father… please run," he repeated.

'There's no way I'll run.'

"Don't worry, Mr. Bahamut. I… I'll protect you," I told him.

I revealed a weak smile.

"You don't need to do that for me… If… the seed of evil inside me is actually taking root—"

"No. *Haa*… The seed of evil hasn't eaten away at you yet. I'm… sure of it. *Haa… haa…*" I interrupted him.

Bahamut was a terrifying and towering man, but he was cowering at the idea of getting corrupted.

It was understandable, as he didn't know anything else other than being Lucifer's loyal servant.

He was the fearless hero of the continent, Lucifer's strongest sword, and a pillar of the continent, but he was afraid of getting corrupted. He wasn't expressing that fear, but he couldn't hide his gaze filled with anxiety from me.

He was worried about abandoning his goddess and afraid of getting cursed.

This was why brainwashing was so scary when done at a young age.

There was a long silence.

Did he think that my comment about how the seed of evil wasn't eating away at him yet was nothing more than words of comfort? Was it because he could no longer watch me get hurt, or could it be that he felt like allowing himself to be devoured by the darkness would ensure that I would no longer be in pain?

"…"

"…"

[You should say something to the hero who's losing hope.]

'That's it.'

I shattered the silence, saying, "This isn't like you, Templar Bahamut."

"…"

"This isn't like you. You were always confident. The person I've been watching all this while was a bit more courageous… stronger… and determined…" I said.

"…"

"I've been watching you," I told him.

"…"

"From the heavens… I watched… your story. You are Lucifer's sword, the pillar of the continent, a guardian, and the hero with a ton of responsibilities on your shoulders. I've been watching you, and you… you've always been a beacon of light on this land.

"You've been through many trials and hardships, but in the end, you proved that Lucifer's light is righteous," I said.

"Father…"

“I’m sorry I couldn’t tell you sooner, Mr. Bahamut. I’m really sorry… I couldn’t show this side sooner. I’m sorry I didn’t catch on sooner,” I added.

“…”

“I-I believe that you’ll be able to suppress the demon’s seed, and I know better than anyone that you won’t surrender to the demonic power,” I said.

I got prepared to cry.

“I know you can overcome this as well… I’m sure you’ll be able to prove once again that the light is righteous,” I said.

“Why… are you…”

'Why do I have so much faith in you, you ask?'

There was no reason whatsoever, and perhaps it was simply because I just wanted to believe.

I was sure Bahamut wanted a clear answer, but I couldn’t remember the script here, so I simply smiled at him. Sometimes, a smile could express more messages than a thousand words.

“*AAAAAH!*”

‘Ah, shit. You scared me.’

Bahamut was crying.

“*AAAAAH!*”

Bahamut started fighting the unknown seed of evil inside him. Perhaps he thought he could find a way to fight back. Was he thinking that the light remaining inside of him could fight the demon’s seed? Could he really channel the immense holy power inside him to destroy the demon’s seed?

“*AAAAAAH!*”

It was so absurd that I almost laughed out loud at the sight of it.

Obviously, the darkness was still there.

His red eyes, pitiful face, and muscles that looked like they were going to burst weren't helping him at all.

— Looks like you're done with your absurd play. Wait, you're still not done? *Haha… hahahaha!* How funny! *Hahahahaha!* Do you really think you can fight back? A mere human… you're nothing but a human… *Haha!* How dare you try to resist the demon's seed, you imbecile! The result is obvious, and you know that better than anyone, angel of sacrifice!

"His light will not go out," I said.

— It's useless.

"I won't let that happen," I said.

— I-It… can't be…

'That tone makes it obvious that you're acting.'

[It's an important part. I was simply trying to emphasize my delivery.]

'That's true. I respect it.'

"Templar Bahamut… No, Mr. Bahamut," I said.

"F-Father?"

"I believe… you'll be able to overcome the seed of evil," I told him.

It was a line I used on Draktaris as well.

"But now isn't the time," I added.

"…"

"It's been…" I paused.

"…"

“It’s been… really fun,” I continued.

Swooooooosh!

And that was when I heard a familiar voice.

[A Mythic-rank Forced Quest has been activated.]

[Don’t do it. Please. I beg you. Please… don't do it. (0/1)]

“…”

[A Mythic-rank Forced Quest has been activated.]

[Come back. Please… please… (0/1)]

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1. Lee Ki-Young’s POV ☜

CHAPTER 992
THE END OF THE SOCIAL GATHERING (3)

'What's this... '

[A Mythic-rank Forced Quest has been activated.]

[Please don't do it. Please… (0/1)]

'Who's this?'

[A Mythic-rank Forced Quest has been activated.]

[Please come back. (0/1)]

'Who the hell sent this?'

Of course, I had a hunch about the identity of the one who was sending me these quests, as only a handful of people were capable of sending quests like this. It couldn't be Saint Altanus, and it clearly wasn't Lucifer.

I was convinced that it was someone in the future, but I couldn't understand how they could send this quest to me. It was impossible to deliver a quest to someone in a different era.

That was the reason I was forced to use items to send a message to Jin Cheong.

Despite that, the Forced Quests were nonstop.

[A Mythic-rank Forced Quest has been activated.]

[That's not where you should be, Mr. Ki-Young. (0/1)]

It was probably Kim Hyun—whatever his name was.

I couldn't really remember his name, but I knew that he was the Sunset Swordsman

who lied on a daily basis. We had been disconnected from each other, but that was the only explanation here.

Our souls were once connected, so he had to have found a method to contact me, or a variable that I couldn't understand had appeared.

'Does he remember me now?'

I had no idea what was happening over there, but I could feel something rushing in like a tide. I felt this before, and it was very similar to the time when he tried to repair our broken bond. It broke through the wall and enveloped me.

"…"

Then, I felt a stinging pain in my eye. I couldn't stop smiling at the sensation.

It wasn't Morse code or anything, but a light flickered in my eye as if it were sending me a message. It was like the stinging pain was telling me their current situation. I couldn't see it for myself, but my eye was probably changing colors from my original color to black while emitting a radiant light as if it were a flickering light bulb.

Unlike me, Bahamut seemed enraged, which was surprising.

"*AAAHHH!*"

'This bastard… is seriously… '

Bahamut was desperately resisting the demon's seed, so he probably thought that my golden eye, which was a symbol of my holiness, was disappearing under the influence of the demon's seed.

"*AAAAHHHH!*" Bahamut roared as loudly as he could while unleashing his holy power.

'It's not because of you so stop over exaggerating. Stop being hopeful and just accept the ending of this story.'

"*RAAAHHH!*"

'No, this isn't because of you.'

I had even told him, "It’s been fun," but he wasn't listening at all. I was kind of embarrassed because we were about to reach the end. There were no perfect break-ups, but this atmosphere was close to being the perfect break-up.

“*Ahhhhhhhhhhh!!!*”

‘You’re so loud.’

Of course, I couldn’t let him keep screaming like that, as the louder he screamed, the more wounds would appear all over me. Sharp black spears swept past me, generating a whistling noise as they streaked through the air.

There was blood everywhere, and the screaming guy finally realized that what he was doing was nothing but a meaningless tantrum. The more he struggled, the more injuries I sustained.

“*Ah… ahh…”* Bahamut gasped in despair, but the angel of sacrifice didn’t stop moving.

I found it really strange that I could still move, but I dragged my injured self and used the mirror of light to light up the darkness.

It was such a godly and holy sight.

It was so beautiful that it would render just about anyone speechless at the sight of it. The way I was walking on the bumpy path while vanquishing the darkness would probably remind anyone of a holy ritual.

— What do you think you’re doing?! Angel of sacrifice! *Ha… hahahaha!* Pain will follow you. Everyone who treasures you will forget you, and you’ll eventually become alone. That vessel of yours… the angel who has been protecting the light since time immemorial will soon greet his final moments, and it is all because of the seed of evil inside you!

He kindly explained to Bahamut, who was unaware of the story's setting. His acting was so natural that Bahamut would definitely soon figure out what kind of situation we were in.

[A Mythic-rank Forced Quest has been activated.]

[It’s all my fault. Please… Please stop. Please don’t abandon this place. (0/1)]

'I'm not abandoning you.'

[A Mythic-rank Forced Quest has been activated.]

[Don't leave everything behind. Everyone is waiting for you, Mr. Ki-Young. Everyone is… Didn't you say it was all over now? Didn't you say we'll carry all the burdens together? You said we can overcome all difficulties as long as we're together. (0/1)]

'He sure talks a lot.'

I walked nonstop, and I saw the iron maiden at the end of the road that the holy torch could barely illuminate.

I disliked how it was standing alone in the dark, but everything was going to change the moment I went inside of it. The angel, who had voluntarily shattered his own wings for the continent, would soon enter that iron maiden.

I was hoping that they had upgraded the interior and made it comfortable for me, at the very least.

— All right, I'll acknowledge that righteous heart of yours… but don't think that things will go your way! Don't think I'll just stand and watch you struggle! The seed of evil will bloom, and in the end, there will be blood and destruction ALL OVER the continent!

"…"

The pitch-black flames of plague descended, so I spread my remaining wings to protect myself before continuing on my walk toward the iron maiden.

I heard a *sizzle*, but my gaze remained firm.

I was taking it slow—taking one step at a time, but my feet left heavy footsteps of light.

'I'm kind of like that Kim-whatever.'

The hero of the continent.

I had never confronted a demon like this.

— Let’s see if you can endure this.

I looked holy, but the angel of sacrifice had a limit. Like those cliched movies, I soon reached my limits. However, it was typical for the selfless hero to move his fleshly body with his sheer willpower.

A curtain of darkness pervaded the entire space, and there were tiny explosions all over my wings in an attempt to push me back, but the attacks were only going to break my fleshly body, not my spirit.

I abandoned the wings that could no longer move and moved forward while covering my face with both hands. At this point, there was a line I needed to say, and this was also the perfect timing to play the background music.

— How!! How!!! How come you can still move?! How!!!

How come I could still move? The answer was obvious.

[A Mythic-rank Forced Quest has been activated.]

[Don’t sacrifice yourself… Please… don’t try to abandon everything and leave. (0/1)]

“*Haa… Heuk…* The light never loses,” I said.

[A Mythic-rank Forced Quest has been activated.]

[I won’t forget. I won’t forget ever again. So… don’t do that. Don’t act as if none of it happened. I’m sure we can overcome it together this time as well, just like always. (0/1)]

'Stop interrupting me. I’m losing focus. This is an important part.'

— There’s no way that you can keep moving just because of that! That can’t be!

“…” — That's impossible!

Belial’s acting was great—really great. He delivered that cliched line perfectly.

“You…” I said.

“You do know it, don't you? Monarch of Lies and Instigation… Demon Lord of Plagues… When humans… are protecting something precious to them… *Haa… haa…* they become… stronger,” I explained.

— Bullshit!

“I saw it. *Haa… Ack…* I’ve… always watched them… with my own eyes. They’re weak… sometimes selfish, and they make many mistakes… but to protect… the things that are precious to them… they overcome their pain… and sadness to stand tall,” I added.

— Don’t make me laugh! That’s absurd!

“I’ve always been watching them… I've seen everything… from the sidelines. And… I now understand… just how brave… how amazing… and how courageous they are. They’re a lot stronger… and more beautiful than you think,” I continued.

—…

“I… I don’t have that kind of courage… I ran and hid… but I’m different now,” I said.

— *Aaargh!* How dare *yooooooooou!!!*

“Maybe… Maybe… I’ve gotten closer to them… Maybe I… can take a step forward as well…” I said.

Really… really…

It was unfortunate that there was only one person in the audience.

Yeah, it was kind of cheesy, but as the director, my plan would never fail.

There was a reason cliches were always effective. Considering the current state of affairs, this was a masterpiece that deserved to be forever known as the GOAT.

Bahamut was crying, and he was furious at his incompetence.

He was grateful for my devotion, and he was afraid of the demon’s seed inside him.

Despite his large frame, Hero Bahamut cast a worried gaze at me.

I was sure he had never felt this helpless before.

“N-No…”

'Yes.'

“Father… Father!” Bahamut shouted.

We said farewell earlier, so there wouldn't be a second farewell.

There was nothing more pitiful than looking back, either.

[A Mythic-rank Forced Quest has been activated.]

[Mr. Ki-Young, please… (0/1)]

Now that I thought about it…

‘I do want to have a cup of coffee.’

I forgot to add drinking coffee to my schedule. I should’ve drank a cup… before leaving.

[A Mythic-rank Forced Quest has been activated.]

[Please… (0/1)]

“…”

“Please… don’t leave,” someone said and grabbed my hand.

‘Shit. Was Belial just watching until he got here?’

I looked back instinctively and…

“Come back to where Miss Ha-Yan and Mr. Deok-Gu are…”

“…”

“Let’s go back… to where the Blue Guild is,” he suggested.

It had been a long time since I saw that face.

CHAPTER 993
THE END OF THE SOCIAL GATHERING (4)

'Why is he here?'

It all happened in a flash. It was so sudden that I fell into a daze.

I thought I was seeing things, so I rubbed my eyes and looked at him again, but nothing changed. Kim-whatever was looking at me while crying. He was probably heartbroken by how pitiful I looked. I told myself that I had to say something, but this drunkard had appeared so suddenly that I had no idea how to react to it.

'If I say… who are you… '

If I were to say that, the atmosphere would turn for the worse.

It was a card I could use someday, but this wasn't the right time to use that card.

'This wasn't part of the plan.'

Kim Hyun-Sung's intrusion was the most unlikely variable out of all the variables I had in mind.

'Was there another invitation?'

I was convinced that there was another invitation, but how did he even find it? Wait… what made us lose connection? How did he get his memories back? How did he come here?

The future had already changed, so it was possible that a rift had appeared in the system, as the future wasn't set in stone yet. Despite that, it was an undeniable fact that the future had already changed. Otherwise, my eye wouldn't have changed.

'Did he use the invitation that Spirit Gelk had in hand?'

I didn't exist in the changed future, so it was highly likely that the invitation I had

used was in the bag that Spirit Gelk was carrying.

I had to enter the iron maiden first before the raid on Gelk would happen, so there were things I had yet to figure out.

When one thing became suspicious, everything would become suspicious. I was also worried about the fact that the future had changed quicker than I thought. It changed before I could enter the iron maiden. The difference was only a few hours, but…

'It doesn't make sense that Kim Hyun-Sung managed to find me so quickly.'

I couldn't come up with a decent theory about that, as I didn't know exactly what had happened in the future, but I could make a reasonable assumption.

'If he forgot me intentionally… '

There was a chance that the expedition group had decided to forget me intentionally. I was not sure how they went about that, but they had to have decided to change the future on their end.

With that in mind, I made several assumptions about what had happened.

First of all, the expedition group had to have been really confused when they realized that their memories of the Saint of Light were gradually disappearing. This was just my first assumption, but I was sure that most of them tried not to forget about me.

Kim Hyun-Sung or Jung Ha-Yan had probably brought disaster to the expedition group, and it was possible that the future started changing at that point in time. It also matched the timeline when Commander Jin sent that Morse code.

My second assumption was that they decided to accept the changes in the future upon thinking of a method that was still unknown to me. Unfortunately, their acceptance happened earlier than I had planned.

I was sure I could ask this Kim whatever-guy, but the Hero of Shadows knew the answer as well. The expedition group working with the Blue Guild had probably rejected the idea of accepting the changed future, so I was sure the idea to do this came from Commander Jin.

He was probably trying his best not to forget about me. In the end, however, he decided to accept the changes first instead of waiting for it to come.

Why would he do that?

It was all for the sake of using Gelk's invitation to come here at the right time.

If they attempted to use the invitation once I had already become Altanus, then this Kim whatever-guy wouldn't have arrived here in time, but that wasn't the only reason behind Commander Jin's decision.

He probably thought it was impossible to avoid the future that had already changed, but it was a different story when it came to a future that could still be changed. He probably believed that he could avoid getting affected by the changes.

'It happened inside the dungeon first, so only the members who were part of the expedition group at the time could have accepted the changes before anyone else could do so.'

The future inside the dungeon had changed, but the future outside the dungeon had remained the same. The reason the Hero of Shadows encouraged those members to accept the changes was that he wanted to rely on the people outside the dungeon.

I would often forget this fact, but…

'But Ji-Hye noona is controlling a succubus.'

It was a reasonable way of making the Blue Guild remember me.

My third assumption was that Lee Ji-Hye probably entered Kim Hyun-Sung's dream to wake him up and make him use the invitation that Spirit Gelk was carrying with him.

'They must be out of their minds.'

There was no guarantee that they'd succeed. It was probably their first time experiencing a phenomenon where the present was changing because of the future, and they also didn't have enough time and manpower to do some research on it.

They could use the Dummy World, but there was no guarantee that Dummy World

would show the same results as reality.

Even the tiniest variable during the process could result in them getting lost in other dimensions; they could easily find themselves trapped in a completely unfamiliar dimension, and they'd be forced to wander in that dimension for eternity.

'Those crazy bastards.'

I was talking about Jin Cheong, as he was definitely the one who made that suggestion, but the people who had accepted his suggestion were crazy as well.

Jung Ha-Yan could have been torn apart by the work that she had to do; all because of Jin Cheong's assumption.

"Kim Hyun-Sung, you…" I paused.

"I-I… want to become a regressor," Kim Hyun-Sung said.

"…"

"I want to become a regressor. I don't want a future where I'm not the regressor," Kim Hyun-Sung said.

"…"

"I have to become the regressor," Kim Hyun-Sung demanded.

'Really? Then you can add being a regressor to your plan.'

"Everyone is waiting. They're waiting for you to come back, Mr. Ki-Young," Kim Hyun-Sung said.

I finally knew how I was getting messages from the future.

It wasn't from the future. He was sending messages to me upon getting invited here.

"Mr. Ki-Young… you don't need to do this anymore," Kim Hyun-Sung said.

'I agree.' If it weren't for the future I had seen through Kasugano Yuno, I honestly wouldn't have come here. *'If I go back now, will everything be ready?'*

Was there any guarantee that I wouldn't encounter that future again? The Blue Guild's obsession to get me back was praiseworthy… but could they *avoid* that future? Was I ready? Had I prepared everything that I needed as the Priest of Prophecy?

I was honestly worried, and the reason I came up with Plan B was to get rid of this anxiety. I had to control every single detail, and this was the only way that I could do that. If I weren't a crazy control freak, I wouldn't have come here.

I tried to move, but I couldn't move at all.

"Belial?"

[…]

"What are you doing?"

[I've got my hands full.]

"What the hell are you talking about?"

[I really need to take care of this.]

"You…"

And that was when I saw something strange…

'What the… What is this? What is this?'

I was the only one feeling cozy and comfortable. Everything around me had distorted, and I could hear creaking noises everywhere.

Kim Hyun-Sung's mana had pervaded everything nearby, and even the pitch-black virtual visual effects were being suppressed.

I could see that Belial was getting ready to leave, and it was probably because he believed that he wouldn't be able to handle what was going to happen next. It made sense, as he wasn't here in his complete form, after all.

Meanwhile, Bahamut's eyes were as wide as saucers as he stared at me.

He could feel himself getting suppressed as well.

'He'll grow stronger in the future.'

Bahamut was just a four-star character, so wouldn't be able to beat the seven-star Kim Hyun-Sung. I could already feel that he was instinctively afraid of Kim Hyun-Sung.

"W-Who are you…" Bahamut stammered. His reaction made the 4D battle that happened just now look like it was nothing. He was covered in sweat, and his fear was no different from his fear of knowing that the demon's seed was inside of him.

He was truly afraid of Kim Hyun-Sung.

A hostile air pervaded the hall, and the pressure was mounting. Bahamut was afraid that his head would detach from his shoulders if he moved even just a bit. He was always a predator, but he was suddenly the prey, so he had no idea what to do.

The Sunset Demon. Kim Hyun-Sung probably looked like that in Bahamut's eyes.

"What the… hell are you…" Bahamut asked.

"…"

"I-I asked what you are!" Bahamut shouted.

"…"

"L-Let go… of the Priest of Prophecy… Sunset… Demon…" Bahamut mumbled.

"Mr. Ki-Young…" Kim Hyun-Sung said.

"Y-You… monster…" Bahamut mumbled.

I had to say something.

"Don't kill him," I said.

'Don't kill Bahamut. He's the hero of this era, and he's the shield that the continent needs until it's stable.'

[I'll be heading out now.]

'Wait, Belial. If you do that…"

[You violated the contract first. *He's…* not part of the contract. Anyway… I had fun.]

"You…"

[As my parting gift, I'll leave that ominous black smoke here. However, it's going to disappear soon.]

"The future… The future will change. If you kill him…" I paused.

"…"

"Let go of him!" Bahamut shouted.

In the end, Bahamut got up. However, he was blasted away with a *boom*, and he slammed into a wall.

'Shit, how did he do that?'

I couldn't do anything.

"Let's go back," Kim Hyun-Sung said.

Kim Hyun-Sung went from being the "I'm sorry" robot to the "let's go back" robot.

"What… the hell… are you?! You monster!" Bahamut yelled as he got up with dirt all over him.

[I wonder how this will end.]

The Monarch of Lies and Instigation became an onlooker.

"He's not an enemy, Templar… Bahamut," Altanus said, stepping forward.

"…?" I glanced at her, as her words were just absurd.

I looked up at Kim Hyun-Sung, and he seemed relieved upon seeing Altanus.

‘The two of you… ’

“…”

‘The two of you… met. You met Altanus… before coming here.’

I realized that I lost my right to make a decision the moment Kim Hyun-Sung arrived here.

“I want to thank you for the things you've done… and are trying to do by coming to this shabby place,” Altanus said.

The atmosphere changed instantly.

“I’d like to thank you, Father. You… have… no idea how touched I was. I can’t explain it, but…” Altanus trailed off. Her determined voice sounded loud and clear as she continued, “However, the Underground Temple is where I must be… I must be responsible for it, and I must protect this place.

"The destruction of the continent is something *I* must endure; it is not for an outsider to endure. It’s also my job to sacrifice myself for the continent,” Altanus continued.

“Benigoa?” I said.

Our eyes met. It was brief, but I felt something indescribable.

“…”

“…”

“This brief social gathering has ended, so…” Altanus trailed off.

“…”

“*Haa… Hmm.*”

“…”

“Be careful on your way back…” Altanus said. She placed her hands on her stomach

and bowed. I wanted to stretch my hand out toward her, but her appearance resembled the noble and holy goddess whom I had in mind, so… all I could do was stare at her.

“Let’s meet again, Father. In the far future,” Altanus said.

I closed my eyes.

CHAPTER 994
YOU REAP WHAT YOU SOW (1)

When I opened my eyes, I saw a few people who were pleased to see me.

“It’s Father Lee Ki-Young.”

“Father Lee Ki-Young has returned.”

“The operation is a success. *Hahaha*. It’s a success!”

“Contact headquarters. Tell the commander things went as planned.”

“Are you okay? I’ll check your condition…”

I instinctively looked around.

Most of the priests were praying while crying, the mercenaries cheering while hugging each other, and expedition members were clapping. I was out of it because they were so loud, but I could clearly see that the members of the Blue Guild weren’t here.

I couldn't even see Kim Hyun-Sung.

I looked around again and realized I returned to the place where I had first used the invitation.

Kim Hyun-Sung had used the invitation at a different location, so I understand why he wasn't here. Had he ordered the reserve forces to be on stand-by here in case I return?

While I was puzzled, I was trembling for some reason. My body wasn't behaving like normal, and tears wouldn’t stop flowing down my cheeks.

An unknown feeling took over me. It didn’t make sense, but…

‘I must be calming down.’

In the end, my plan to become Altanus failed, and… my body was relieved that it ended up that way. I managed to be safe, but I felt a strangely unpleasant sense of relief.

‘No, that can’t be it.’

'This is anger, damn it. If this wasn’t anger, it was a side-effect of crossing space and time. That must be burdensome for both the body and the mind.'

I stayed in the past for a long time, so it was only natural for me to sustain mental damage. In other words, it was not strange that I couldn't think properly.

“Father Lee Ki-Young, are you okay?”

“This place… Why am I here…” I asked.

“I think Commander Jin’s plan worked.”

“What plan…” I questioned.

“I’m sorry I can’t tell you the details. The only order we received was to be on stand-by here…”

‘Yeah, of course you wouldn’t know.’

“Anyway, we’ll take you to a safe—”

“No, I’ll get going now,” I interrupted them.

“What? But…”

“The expedition group…” I said.

‘You scummy bastard.’

It was highly likely that the Morse code in the middle of all this was a bluff as well. This was probably the bare minimum of effort he needed to put in so that he could be in control.

“Jin Cheong, you bastard…” I mumbled. *‘No, don’t let it get to you.’*

He’d be happy to see me get worked up. Honestly, I got backstabbed, so he’d probably tease me. While I was trying to calm myself down a little, a message arrived.

— Looks like you’re back.

"…”

— In the end… you've returned, Lee Ki-Young. Did you think things were going to go your way? *Haha*. Did you really think you could defeat me?

‘Crazy bastard.’

I was prepared to sacrifice for my comrades while carrying out that ridiculous plan about becoming Altanus. In his eyes, it had to have been a desperate maneuver on my side to win the game.

'I want to win the game, but do you really think I'll go through all that just to win? Who would be crazy enough to do that?'

"How… did you do this?"

— Who knows… How did I do it?

'This jerk.'

— You sound curious. You really can't think of anything? What should I do? Should I give you a hint…

I had an idea because I had come up with many possibilities earlier, but my pride would get hurt if I were to ask for confirmation from him. I was also scared to speak confidently, as it was possible that I actually had the wrong answer all this while.

I couldn’t even imagine how happy he'd be if my assumption was wrong.

— You’ll find out once you look through the dungeon raid records later. Since this is the era where we leave video records, it’s the best way for you to get answers.

"You must have your head in the clouds to be talking like this… but… I have an idea. I'm honestly not that curious… and I asked because there's a process to everything, and you could have made a mistake as well. It's your specialty to ruin things while trying to resolve it."

— You sure talk big. What would you know when you've seen nothing? About that distorted spacetime, and how to control it… you might've guessed those correctly, but it doesn't change the fact that your nature remains unchanged. Basically, you know nothing.

"You seem more confident than I thought. You said you didn't like my method, but you used it pretty well."

— *Ha… hahahahaha. Ah…* you're talking about the code. Hmm, I wonder. Was it a bluff? There's too much to explain. It's true that I was in dangerous situations, but… what do you think? *Hahahaha!* Are you curious? You must be… really curious! Who knew you'd be the type to be *this* curious?

"You bastard!" I yelled.

— *Hahahaha!*

I really wanted to kill that bastard.

Naturally, I started talking to Lee Ji-Hye.

"Noona, I have something I want to ask you. Could you share… the work you did with Jin Cheong."

— I have nothing to discuss with you right now. I'll contact you later.

— Noona, how could you…

— Shut up.

Shit.

— Entertain me more, Lee Ki-Young. *Hahahahahaha!*

"You scummy bastard!" I yelled.

— *Hahahahaha!*

“You jerk! You bastard! You dirty copycat!” I shouted.

“Father… Lee Ki-Young?”

“Go away, damn it!” I yelled.

I wouldn’t exactly consider this venting out my anger, but right after I got up, I grabbed a sword and started hitting stuff. I heard *clank, clank* instead of *kaboom, kaboom.* My hands were hurting, but my actions helped me calm down.

— You’re not taking your anger out on anyone, are you? *Hahahaha*.

“*Whoo… whoo…* this jerk. If it fails this time…”

— Angry? It sounds like you’re angry…

"No, I'm not…

— *Hahaha!*

"Well… I don’t know what to say…”

—…

"Thank you, Commander. I honestly thought it was all over."

—…

His reply didn’t arrive right away.

— What?

"Thank you. Thank you… very much."

— What are you up to now…

"It’s nothing like that. I’m telling you this because I’m really grateful."

—…

—…

"I'm busy… so let's talk later."

I was pretty sure Jin Cheong had never received any love from someone, as he was the type to get shocked whenever people were nice to him.

"Excuse me… Father… Lee Ki-Young?"

I decided to smile brightly.

"Yes? Is something wrong…" I asked.

"No… it's nothing."

"Can you tell me the current raid status?" I requested.

"S-Sure."

'Is it safe to assume Plan B was executed?'

There were many things I had to handle about the expedition group—no, I had many things to worry about.

'What's going to happen in the end?'

Plan B had ended up failing. it had to have happened a bit early, but Altanus had probably entered the iron maiden and watched over everything. The Benigoa I knew still existed, and the future that Kasugano Yuno had seen hadn't happened yet.

'It's the most perfect way to decrease the number of variables.'

The surest way to avoid facing the future Kasugano Yuno had seen was no more. That damned, wicked demon summoner had brought danger to the continent, but I had no time to resent him or look back on the past.

'I've failed, but… '

“It’s not like I didn’t do anything,” I said.

I had created an incomplete picture. If this succeeded, it’d be better than Plan B.

At least I could ensure that my babies wouldn't forget me.

I unknowingly looked at the mirror and saw that my golden eye hadn't lost its light.

“Tell Kim Hyun-Sung not to come here,” I ordered.

“What? But—”

“Tell him,” I interrupted them.

“Y-Yes, sir.”

I started walking away.

‘I did something.’

“Father Lee Ki-Young!”

I could clearly see what I needed to do at this point. I needed to harvest the seed that I had sowed a very long time ago. I shook off the people trying to grab me and ran away.

“Father Lee Ki-Young! Damn it! Get him!”

I ignored their shouts and ran as fast as I could. Soon, I was approaching my destination.

“What? But—”

“Damn it! Move! Move while protecting Father Lee Ki-Young!”

‘It’s time to get my reward.’

“What the hell am I supposed to do… Damn it… it’s over…” I mumbled.

“You must rest, Father Lee Ki-Young. Please…”

'If I end up in the room with no windows, everything will be for nothing.'

They seemed to be worried that I could get hurt by their dirty hands, so they couldn't stop me at all. They were busy protecting me, and they seemed worried about how they were going to report this to their superiors.

However, I wasn't the one who was going to be punished for it, so I couldn't care less.

'This is good for you guys as well.'

I was running out of breath, but I felt energetic when I saw a familiar back.

"Hyung-nim?" Park Deok-Gu said.

"You're…"

"*Haa… haa…* The Priest of Prophecy has returned! *Heuk…* Father Draktaris…!" I sobbed.

—…

"The Priest of Prophecy has returned… *Heuk…"* I repeated.

And then…

— *Ahhhhhh!* The Priest of Prophecy! *Heuk…* The Priest of Propheeecyyyyyy! *Heuk…! Heuuuuk!*

Our reunion scene popped into my head.

'I'm scared to see you die.'

— The Priest of Propheeecyyy! *Heuk! Heuk!*

'I'm afraid!'

My precious… my extremely precious…

"I know better than anyone that you're not supposed to die here. In the far future… In the very far future, you'll do something great, Father. I can't tell you the details, but

you… will save this Underground Temple… and Saint Altanus. You'll do greater things than stabilizing this place right now."

Our precious memories.

"I trust that you'll keep your promise and be the single ray of light that shines in darkness. No matter what hardship comes your way… even if there's a situation you can't endure, you must do your best, but today… today isn't your time to die."

These were words I couldn't tell anyone else…

"Swear on Lady Lucifer's name that until they find you, even if it's not me… I'm talking about the people who truly love Lady Lucifer, people who want to reform the Underground Temple, people blessed by the Goddess, and those who have been selected by the light… swear on Lady Lucifer's name that until they appear before you…!

"You must survive and wait… be patient until they appear before you… be patient for the sake of the hope that will come someday. Swear that you'll live… for the sake of that day!"

It was short, but it was a beautiful and precious connection.

"Promise me!"

The dungeon's spirit crumbled, and he kissed my feet.

— I've been waiting… for you… For the day of your arrival. I've been living and enduring… hardships again and again…

CHAPTER 995
YOU REAP WHAT YOU SOW (2)

'Look at this guy giving up so fast.'

It was such a magnificent scene.

'Look at this idiot. Do you see this? This is the result.'

"Father… Draktaris…" I mumbled.

There wasn't a sight that made me happier than this.

Describing it as righteous and holy wasn't enough to describe the sight.

For some, it was heart-wrenching; for others, it was a tear-jerker; for others, it was awe-inspiring enough to clench their fist. It seemed like everyone was reacting to this in their own ways, but their eyes were on me—the saint of the continent who made this miracle happen.

I saw traces of the bloody battle, and it told me that the battle had never stopped. The

party members were fighting Father Draktaris for a long time, and the members who were in the same party as Cha Hee-Ra and Park Deok-Gu were covered in wounds.

They looked exhausted as if they had been fighting for several days.

The only ones who were fine were the vanguards with high Stamina.

The young blood Rafael seemed to have lasted this long due to the fact that he was young.

Meanwhile, Sun Hee-Young and Elena, who were the core of the rearguards, looked like they were going to lose consciousness at any moment.

Alps, who had joined the party to counter mental-type skills, seemed like she was at her limit by just standing there while Shiro was sprawled out on the ground and breathing heavily.

I couldn't care less about Jin Cheong's underlings, but they looked at me with their disheveled faces. At first, they were in disbelief, and then, they smiled brightly. They had to be happy to see me as well.

"Hyung-nim? Are you back? Hyung-nim! I knew you were going to come back! I just knew!" Park Deok-Gu shouted.

'Yeah, I'm back.'

"Darling? Where have you been?" Cha Hee-Ra asked.

'It's been a while, Hee-Ra noona.'

"*Ahh…* thank you, Elune. Thank you very much," Elena said.

'It's been a while since I saw you as well, Miss Elena.'

"Mr. Lee Ki-Young…"

'Hey, Hee-Young.'

"*Woof!*"

'Shiro is suddenly full of energy.'

Obviously, there were endless requests for a handshake, but I was sad because I couldn't shake the hand of each and every person. At a glance, I could tell what had been happening to the expedition group, even though I had been stuck in the past.

'They must've continued the raid separately from the main force… '

I was sure they were aware of the demon summoner's evil plan. I walked past the people sprawled out on the ground while greeting them.

I checked the faces of each and every person.

Park Deok-Gu was already crying, and Hee-Ra noona sighed as if she expected it.

'They followed my instructions and dispatched the people I recommended.'

The members in the prayer room were people whom I recommended when it came to tackling the Epic-rank quest, Archbishop of the Prayer Room. I couldn't tell whether he was getting pushed back or they were getting pushed back, but a fierce battle had lasted here for a long time.

Honestly, I was kind of surprised by Father Draktaris' true power.

I didn't expect much from the others, but I couldn't understand how he managed to stand against Cha Hee-Ra and Rafael. If I hadn't recommended talented priests, the expedition group would have gotten taken down long ago.

It was a thought that kept popping into my head, which made this scene even more meaningful.

The priest who saved the party from danger, the saint who made the boss kneel with one word, and the holy crystal that purified the impure with light. The same priest spoke again.

"*Heuk... heuuuk...* Father Draktaris…"

— I've been waiting… for you… For the day of your arrival. I've been living and enduring… hardships again and again…

"Father Draktaris…" I said.

—…

"*Ahh...* Father Draktaris," I repeated.

—…

"Why… why… did you become this way?" I questioned.

Even the tall and handsome Draktaris couldn't avoid the ruthless passage of time.

"Why… have you become like this?" I asked.

Even when Bahamut and the Templars were seeking eternal life, he decided to accept the passage of time. He already had white hair, and I saw wrinkles all over his face. His white mustache was messy, and his back was bent, even though he always stood ramrod straight.

I could still see faint signs of his younger version. However, if I wasn't taking a closer look at him, I would think I was looking at someone else.

— A lot of time… A lot of time passed… Priest of Prophecy.

He had accepted death and had stayed, even though his fleshly body could move no more.

“Why… why have you… *Heuk*… changed so much?” I asked.

— It wasn’t a short time, Priest of Prophecy. However, I never… never lost faith that you’ll return someday. I knew you'd save the Underground Temple, this continent, and Lucifer. No, I knew you'd illuminate the continent.

“But…”

‘I’m sorry. I was late, wasn’t I?’

That was what I wanted to ask, but I was ashamed, so I couldn’t ask him that.

“Buuut… *Heuk…”* I sobbed.

‘Even if that were the case, you changed so much… ’

— You still… have a warm… heart…

“…”

— You don’t have to cry. Priest of Prophecy… I-I want to thank Lucifer… for allowing me to meet you like this.

I tried stopping myself from crying, but I couldn’t stop.

— What I was really afraid of wasn't this body growing old or losing power. I was afraid that I… would never see you again. *Heuk…*

“Father Draktaris…” I mumbled.

— *Geurgh…* I thought I'd never see you again. I regretted that day… so much… I hid in that small room and waited. I waited and waited for that incident to end… I was so ashamed of myself. Can you imagine it—*Geurgh…*

“…”

— After sending you away like that… I lived my whole life… my whole life… regretting it… so much.

“…”

— I questioned why I didn’t stop you… and how I hid when you told me I was going to do something great in the future… I wanted to tear myself apart and throw myself to the demons… for locking myself up in a room like a coward. Despite that… despite that, I had to live.

‘That’s right. You had to live.’

— My only hope… were your words… about your return, Priest of Prophecy.

“…”

— It was my trust in you.

“Please… don’t say anything else,” I said.

After kissing my shoe, he remained on his knees, and there was regret in his voice as he spoke to me. Even in the past, Draktaris respected me a lot, but…

‘He must’ve been deifying me.’

I thought it had reached absurd levels, but of course, this wasn’t an ordinary situation.

‘It’s expected.’

One day, a man proclaiming to be the Priest of Prophecy suddenly appeared, and he became the light by sacrificing himself to save the Underground Temple and the

continent.

I had no idea what the temple thought about me at that time, but Draktaris had been waiting for me to keep my promise since then. He trusted me; he engraved my words into his heart, and he waited for that day to come.

Naturally, my existence grew in his heart.

The longer he waited, the more exhausted he became, so he had no choice but to rely on me. When he was at his limit mentally and physically… he probably recalled my last words. The guilt I felt toward him enveloped me.

'Damn, this makes me happy. You reap what you sow.' I hadn't made a mistake choosing him. *'I knew this was going to succeed. I just knew it.'*

However, there was nothing I could do. After making him stand up, all I did was hug him with my wings. Father Draktaris cried like a child.

"It's… it's okay now, Father Draktaris," I told him.

I wonder what he was thinking right now.

— *Geurgh…* I trusted you.

"I… came back, didn't I?" I asked.

— I'm sorry, Priest of Prophecy. I'm really… really sorry.

"It's not your fault, Father Draktaris," I said.

—…

"All of this is my fault because I'm lacking. I'm really… really sorry… for making you wait too long," I said.

Draktaris mumbled, and the wounds on my body instantly healed.

'Damn, his holy power is nice.'

His holy power was extraordinary.

“They’re my priests,” I said.

I quickly said something in case I forgot about the expedition members, and they started receiving the holy power as well.

— I was rude.

Draktaris no longer cried. The priest, who had been carrying the burdens in his heart, walked with heavy steps and continued the conversation.

— It’s… it’s time.

“…”

— The day we have been waiting for is here.

“…”

— The promised day. The judgement day is here. In order to punish those wicked people who had sold their souls to the demon, the prophesied is here to paint this continent with the light again. The day has come to prove that the holy light containing our faith still exists on this continent. The day that the Priest of Prophecy has mentioned is finally here.

The ground quivered violently.

Rumble!

— Wake up.

The ground shook again.

Rumble!

— Wake up, sons of light. Wake up and fulfill your final mission.

Rumble!

— Use the Goddess’ hammer on those who had sold their souls to the demon!

— *Ahhhhhhhhh!*

Rumble!

— The day when the promise of light is to be fulfilled has come! The time has come… to fulfill our long-cherished wish! An answer to the sacrifice that the Priest of Prophecy had made! The time has come to give our souls and prove ourselves!

Rumble!

— Wake up, sons of light! The promised time is here!

— The promised time is here!

— The promised time is here!

— We'll prove that light exists on this land!

— We'll repay his sacrifice!

Their voices filled the prayer room—no, spirits started gathering outside the prayer room as well. I saw both familiar and unfamiliar faces. The priests raised their voices while the knights moved around.

'This is huge.'

— For the Priest of Prophecy!

'What the hell have you been doing, Draktaris?'

— For the Priest of Prophecy!

'How much respect did you have for me?'

It had been ten thousand years, so it was clear that many things had changed.

I was trembling.

I, the Son of Light, who was also once known as the Priest of Prophecy, quietly wiped away my tears while smiling sadly at the miracle happening before my eyes.

CHAPTER 996
YOU REAP WHAT YOU SOW (3)

"We're going to live forever until the light that descends on this land is restored."

"…"

"Our bodies are vessels for our souls…"

'I don't… I don't think… it was like this.'

"Someday… someday, the angel of sacrifice… will return. He'll… return to the Underground Temple… again. He'll return… someday, no matter what."

"Is that all?" I[1] asked.

"No, there's more to it… but I can't read the rest. It's badly damaged… and it's not easy to interpret it. I don't know what to tell you…"

"…"

"I think this place was used for religious ceremonies. I can't say for sure… but seeing that there's a soul jar—"

"It kind of… kind of changed," I interrupted them.

"…"

"It kind of changed," I repeated.

I wasn't the only one who felt something strange. The Guild Master of the Black Swan Guild, the rangers, and even Park Yeon-Joo, who was in charge of the reconnaissance team, felt indescribably uncomfortable.

Before the strangely distorted spacetime, which headquarters called Spacetime Rift, had taken over this place, I was sure that…

'I'm sure this place wasn't like this.'

It was an easter egg hidden within the Underground Temple.

We only found this place upon discovering and chasing after Templar Simon.

Before the Spacetime Rift appeared, I was pretty sure that there was a huge altar here. I couldn't remember it clearly… but items that looked like they were used for rituals were neatly organized here, and someone emitting light… kept going in and out…

'That's what I remember about this place… '

However, it suddenly became different.

It was extremely dark; there was no light in this place.

There was a nauseating stench, dark red stains, and old skeletons.

It looked like a temple, but it was dilapidated, which told me that no one had ever been here for a long time. There were items scattered around as if this place were a laboratory, and there were books everywhere, too.

It was different from any place I had investigated so far.

The only thing that was intact was the ceremonial altar in the middle. The indescribable discomfort made me sweep the dusty wall with my hands.

And that was when I heard a voice beside me.

"What's that?"

"What?" I asked.

"Step aside for a moment," they ordered.

"*Oh…* okay," I said

I stepped back.

The most important thing when it came to investigations like this was preserving the scene, so I made a mistake by sweeping the wall with my hand.

'Damn it.'

I couldn't believe that I somehow made such a rookie mistake. The talented rangers of the continent had gathered here, and the people here were all famous adventurers. It was particularly true for the rangers.

This was a rare unranked dungeon, making it one of the rarest dungeons in the continent. Rangers were extremely valuable here, and they'd receive a ton of rewards due to the nature of their job. Thus, the competent rangers of the Black Swan Guild were dispatched.

'Damn it.'

I was just a freelancer who had responded to a major guild's request to earn more experience, so this mistake was truly devastating. The guild masters and people whose feats were written in books for rookies in the tutorial dungeon were part of the expedition team.

The rangers of the Blue Guild weren't here for some reason, and I was relieved, as they didn't see me make such a stupid blunder, but…

"What's your name?"

I happened to be standing in front of Park Yeon-Joo of the Black Swan Guild…

'One mistake will end my career… '

"My name is Jung Gap-Soo. Well… this is—"

"Which guild are you from?" she interrupted me.

"I'm a freelancer," I replied.

"It's strange that a ranger like you is a freelancer," Park Yeon-Joo commented.

"Excuse me?" I asked.

And that was when a mage cast a spell at the part of the wall behind me…

A few more people gathered, and it looked as if they were taking apart the wall.

'What the heck?'

"Speak confidently next time. Your contributions will reflect on your rewards. Thank you for your hard work," Park Yeon-Joo said.

"What? *Oh…* I understand," I said.

I wasn't sure what was going on, but it felt like a blessing in disguise.

While I was trying to hide my smile, the door finally opened. Everyone went quiet and started using hand gestures to communicate. I could see them signaling to each other that there could be hostile units inside.

Those with detection-type skills walked inside before anyone else.

Soon afterward, the first group of vanguards walked inside with clenched fists.

"All clear."

There was another altar inside. It seemed to be a temple that could only accommodate five people. Unlike the temple outside, this place was well-organized. No, it *was* well-organized. However, what caught my attention the most was the large mural.

"What's this…" I mumbled.

It had to have been a long time since the mural was made, but it was decently maintained. An angel with a gold eye and several pairs of wings was praying with his hands raised up to the sky.

He resembled a certain someone.

I had a hard time recognizing him, but I felt like everyone reached the same conclusion as me. It wasn't an exact description, but there was only one person anyone would think of when it came to the keywords "golden eye" and "wings."

I turned to the right and saw another mural. An angel fighting a pitch-black demon. He covered his face with his wings and arm while walking toward the pitch-black demon, and there was a red-headed warrior on the ground, seemingly incapacitated.

I looked to my left and saw the red-headed warrior praying toward the angel with wings.

'This is the first mural.'

"I think the pictures start from the left to right," I said.

"This is probably an altar for that angel," Park Yeon-Joo suggested.

"It also looks like a clue to clear the dungeon… There are some things that are a bit puzzling, but there's a chance that we're close to discovering a hidden boss like Spirit Gelk," I said.

"We'll have to investigate more. First of all, let's check to see if there are other devices installed in here," Park Yeon-Joo ordered.

"Okay."

I turned my gaze again and saw another demon on the same mural that depicted the fight between the angel and the pitch-black demon.

The demon was orange and was different from the pitch-black demon. Unlike the pitch-black demon, who was depicted as a large-framed demon, the orange demon wasn't that huge. They had a large horn and several bat wings. He was a typical-looking demon, and he was fighting the pitch-black demon for some reason.

Meanwhile, the angel was trembling amidst the fight.

'Is it trying to depict that they fought over this angel?'

The orange demon won the battle. The pitch-black demon spread a cloud of nauseating mist and fled. The red-headed warrior ran in to protect the angel.

"…"

The red-headed warrior collapsed in a daze, and the orange demon grabbed the

angel.

It was an extremely scary and frightening depiction to the point that I thought the orange demon could be the boss of this dungeon. It was a bizarre mural. In the next mural, the angel disappeared, and there were no more images.

“Does the mural end here?” Park Yeon-Joo asked.

“No, there’s more over here. It’s another passage,” I answered.

“Any traps?” Park Yeon-Joo asked.

“No. I didn’t feel any reactions,” I replied.

The rangers were on the move once again, and we eventually saw the next mural.

Indeed. The mural depicted what had happened next.

It was the story of the red-headed warrior who was left by himself upon the departure of the angel and the orange demon.

The warrior raised their hand toward the sky. Those in the heavens were depicted as holy beings, but none of them stretched their hand out toward the red-headed warrior.

We started walking again.

The warrior from earlier stretched their hand toward the pitch-black demon, but the pitch-black demon didn’t take the warrior’s hand, either.

I saw a mural of the warrior talking to the pitch-black demon as if they were criticizing them, but the pitch-black demon simply lowered their head and remained quiet.

The red-headed warrior cried, and the continent was collapsing in the background. The doors of the Underground Temple were closed, and it looked like the continent was welcoming a new era.

And then, a long-haired angel with black wings reached out toward the warrior.

I couldn’t see anything after that, so I walked deeper inside.

“A mimic?” Park Yeon-Joo asked.

“No, it’s not a trap either… It looks like a chest to store important items,” I replied.

“Open it,” Park Yeon-Joo ordered.

“Okay. It’s a feather,” I said.

“What?”

“It’s a feather that unleashes light. There’s no information on this item… so it’s probably—”

And that was when we heard a loud voice…

“It’s Templar Simon!”

“Did he come here on his own? Prepare for battle!" the others exclaimed.

“Looks like we’re at the right place, Miss Park Yeon-Joo,” I said.

“Miss Park Yeon-Joo? What should we—”

“W-What do you think you guys are doing?” Templar Simon questioned.

“What?”

“I asked what the hell you guys are doing!” yelled Templar Simon.

The rangers rushed out and surrounded Templar Simon.

The reconnaissance team was full of rangers, but it didn't mean that we couldn’t raid a dungeon.

If our opponent was just a lone Templar, we'd probably be more efficient at it than others. Rangers weren’t as efficient as mages and priests, but there were mages and priests with ranger skills.

They were all trained to fight during an emergency.

I wasn't sure what had happened, but Templar Simon wasn't in the best condition.

He was gasping for breath while grabbing his head. He looked… frightened.

"I remember… I remember it all… all of it…" Templar Simon muttered.

I had no idea what he was saying.

"What the hell are you guys doing?!" Templar Simon shouted.

'Has he always been like that? I heard he's more rational… '

"Come out now! Right now! Don't touch that feather!" Templar Simon shouted.

"…"

"Bahamut is coming. *Ahhh… Sob! AAAAHH!* Bahamut is coming!" Templar Simon yelled.

"…"

"I'm sorry, Bahamut! I'm sorry… *Ahh… ahhhhh!*" Templar Simon added.

He was swaying while embracing himself. Something fast pierced him, and he started transforming. He grew in size, and he no longer looked like a human. He looked more like a spider now.

'A demon…!'

"Bahamut is cooooming!!" Templar Simon shouted.

"Demon…" I mumbled.

"Bahamut… won't forgive… you guys… Bahamut… *AAAAHHH!* Bahamut is coming!" Templar Simon yelled.

"Retreat! Retreat!" Park Yeon-Joo shouted.

"*AAAAAHHH!*"

After transforming into a beast, Templar Simon's four feet stuck to the ceiling. Long legs burst out of his back, and he thrust it toward the nearby rangers.

"Give it back! Give that feather back! Be forgiven… with your… death! *Keke…* Bahamut is coming! Bahamut is coming!" Templar Simon shouted.

The last thing I saw was his long legs…

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1. Jung Gap-Soo POV ☜

CHAPTER 997
YOU REAP WHAT YOU SOW (4)

“Scatter!” I[1] ordered.

“Bahamut is *coooooming!*” Templar Simon shouted.

“Crazy bastard!” Park Yeon-Joo yelled.

“Bahamut is coming! *AAAHHH! AAAHHH!*” Templar Simon repeated.

In times of emergency, there was only one thing rangers could do.

If fighting was impossible, then a ranger ought to deliver as much information as possible to the command center. Of course, survival was the top priority. I was sure the command center was aware of our situation, and the nearest reinforcements were definitely on their way here.

"This is Commander Jian of the special ranger unit. We encountered Templar Simon two minutes ago, and we are currently retreating."

— We’re checking your location. If you can provide more detailed information…

"Unconfirmed, but we believe that Templar Simon has transformed into a spider-type monster. No, it’s more like… he became a demon… rather than a monster. We’re currently trying to get a sample of his flesh."

— Is an on-site investigation impossible?

"Negative. As I mentioned earlier, we are retreating. Please help us secure a way out."

— Copy that.

"Additionally, we discovered an unknown catalyst."

— Please give me the details.

"It’s a feather. Templar Simon is obsessed with this feather, and he keeps yelling that Bahamut is coming."

— Understood.

"How long will it take for the reinforcements to rendezvous with us?"

— We sent the nearest ranger unit. They’re expected to arrive in about three minutes…

"A ranger unit? Did you listen to what I said at all? Please send us troops; a ranger unit will not be helpful at all."

— It will take about an hour and forty minutes for a strike squad to arrive—

"We’ll all be dead by then!"

‘Damn it.’

We could have a chance if we were in a forest or somewhere else, but we were in an enclosed secret room, so we were at a disadvantage.

What I saw upon leaving the large cavern was what looked like a maze. Rangers with a good sense of direction wouldn't get lost, but they'd struggle to avoid Templar Simon's detection.

The rangers scattered, but I could still hear screams everywhere. This was Templar Simon's domain, and regardless of his intentions, we had entered the spider lair on our own.

‘Did everyone manage to escape? Who got attacked?’

"Can you… do it quicker?"

— I’m trying to find the fastest escape route. If you wait just a bit longer…

‘Damn it. They’re so slow.’

I knew something like this was going to happen. I had been living a life equivalent to dancing with death, so I was not really afraid of dying. The problem was the

members of the unit.

‘They shouldn't die in a place like this.’

"Is there no other way?"

— Right now, wait! Father Lee Ki-Young… I mean, the Commander of the Strike Squads is going to lead your escape by himself.

‘Father Lee Ki-Young?’

Afterward, I heard static as if notifying me that someone had joined the communication channel. Then, I heard a familiar, yet not-so-familiar voice. I heard his voice many times from afar, but it was my first time speaking directly to him.

— Tell me more about your unit.

"I’m Commander Jian of the special ranger unit. Right now—"

— Number of members?

"Four members are with me. In emergencies, we are to move in groups of five—"

— I’ll send you the coordinates.

"What? We’re currently…”

— Move now.

“W-We’re moving,” I ordered. I could see a path that I couldn’t see before, but of course, I wasn’t sure about it. The map and the route were on the hand mirror, and they arrived so quickly that I became kind of suspicious.

‘Was the operation a success?’

Father Lee Ki-Young’s presence was proof that Commander Jin Cheong’s plan was a success. However, why did it feel like he had taken the lead because he was aware of our current situation? Was that really the case?

Unfortunately, I had no other choice to make. It was an order from the commander,

and I had to follow his path, even if it would lead to my death.

“Run! Run!” I shouted.

“Bahamut is *coooooooming!!!*” Templar Simon yelled.

Boom, boom, boom!

Loud noises echoed; something was pummeling the ground. Soon, the noises faded away, but I knew better than anyone that it was too early to feel relieved.

— Change route.

"What?"

— Change your route. Hurry up and acknowledge.

‘Damn it, at least give me an explanation… ’

“We’re going back,” I commanded.

“What?”

I had no time to explain to the members.

When I tried to move to the place where I heard his voice earlier…

Kaboom!

The ceiling fell, and I saw Templar Simon’s legs.

His large and sharp legs almost grazed the tip of my nose.

‘If we had ignored him and moved forward… ’

Those legs would have skewered us.

Goosebumps broke out all over me.

‘How did he know?’

How come he knew that Templar Simon—no, the spider had moved past us through the ceiling? And how come he knew that the spider was going to attack us?

'Can he see the future or something?'

It didn't really matter.

The important thing was that there was hope.

My tiny suspicion was replaced with hope.

"Bahamut is *cooooooming!!!*" Templar Simon yelled.

"Run!" I shouted.

'We can live.'

It wasn't hard. We just had to follow the coordinates on the hand mirror, and we could escape.

— Change route.

"Understood."

Boom!

— Change route.

"Understood."

Kaboom!!!

I could hear rumbling noises above us. I thought he was only following us, but it did not seem to be the case. His sharp legs were longer than I thought, and we could be within his attack range.

'Does he have eight legs? No, he might have more than eight. How are the others? Are they running away, too?'

And that was when we encountered the remaining rangers…

"*Huh?*"

I noticed they had receivers in their ears as well. Just like us, they were moving according to the coordinates shown on the Goddess' Hand Mirror. I thought they were receiving orders from other commanders, but…

"Understood, Father Lee Ki-Young."

They were gone in a flash as soon as I heard that.

They were moving to a route that was different from ours.

'That can't be. Damn it.'

"It can't be…" I mumbled.

Was he really moving every single ranger unit? Was he controlling all fifty rangers that were divided into ten units by himself?

— Stay there.

I stopped moving.

"I-It's a trap, Commander."

BOOM!

The wall collapsed with a thunderous boom. The trap…

'I checked it, too.'

The problem was that the trap was installed where our allies were located. It was an explosive trap that each unit possessed. It was highly likely the units earlier had installed it for us.

— Move.

"W-What the hell is going on?"

We moved toward the path that our allies' explosive trap had created for us.

— Install a trap. Coordinates… sent. Set the time of the explosion to two minutes and ten seconds.

"U-Understood!"

“I-Install a trap!” I ordered.

“What? O-Okay!” someone exclaimed.

The trap we had just installed could be an exit for our allies.

Two minutes and ten seconds later, I heard a loud explosion.

“It’s done!”

“Thank you, Father Lee Ki-Young! *Haha!*”

I heard the same voice earlier, and I saw spider legs blocking their path.

— Forward.

His order was shocking, but I didn’t question it. *Boom!*

There was another explosion, and I saw Miss Park Yeon-Joo of the Black Swan Guild bursting out of the wall next to us. Templar Simon’s legs were chasing after her, and a space for us to move forward naturally opened up.

‘I don’t understand… what the hell… is going on… ’

We were the ones who had entered the spider lair, but the one who got caught in a spider web was probably Templar Simon.

“I guess there's a reason everyone calls him a genius,” I remarked.

“Bahamut is coming!” Templar Simon yelled.

Boom! Kaboom!

He dropped down from the ceiling and started crawling toward us.

'Are we the last ones?'

— Follow the route, Commander Jian.

Boom! Kaboom!

The large maze was falling apart.

I could no longer see the smart hunter from before, as Templar Simon tried to shove his colossal body into the narrow passageways. In the end, he destroyed everything in his path to move forward.

Templar Simon had become nothing but a monster who only cared about fulfilling his desire.

“You annoying rats! You rats!” Templar Simon shouted.

“Run! Ruuun!” I yelled.

“You rats!” Templar Simon shouted.

“Ruuuuun!” I screamed.

I saw a small passage emitting a faint light. I didn’t receive any other orders. I was on the brink of collapsing from exhaustion, but I gnashed my teeth and marched on.

'I’m almost there… almost there… '

Boom! Boom! Boom!!!

“I’ll sacrifice you to Bahamut! All of you!” Templar Simon yelled.

“*Ahhhhhhhhh!*” I roared and took my final steps. It was a roar that one wouldn't expect from a ranger. Afterward, I immediately looked back.

“*Ahhhhhhhhh! Ahhhhhhhhhh!* Bahamut!” he shouted.

He had trouble getting out of the narrow passage, but the walls before him eventually collapsed.

Boom!

I saw his colossal body, and I despaired at the sight of him.

And that was when I heard a voice from the receiver.

“Start the spider hunt.”

“Yooou… yooou… you… Bahamut! Bahamut!” Templar Simon shouted.

“Bahamut?” I said.

“*AAAHHH! Hahaha! Ahahahaha!* The time… has come! Bahamut!” Templar Simon screamed.

“…”

“…” “Who’s Bahamut, you dirty-looking demon bastard?” I questioned.

“What?”

“Is he a demon, too?” I asked.

With that, a large amount of holy power manifested before me.

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1. Commander Jian’s POV ☜

CHAPTER 998
YOU REAP WHAT YOU SOW (5)

"*AHHH! AAAHHH!*"

The holy power rained down on Templar Simon.

"Stop… *stooop!*" Templar Simon yelled.

Draktaris stood at the helm of the spirits and holy knights. Their group sent wave after wave of holy power toward Templar Simon. Every time they stepped forward, Templar Simon would take a step backward.

When the first row of spirits and holy knights cast their spells, the second row would cast theirs, and the third row would channel their spells at the same time. They were like archers lining up their arrows.

The vanguards raised their shields and got ready to take on the enemy's attacks. They all moved forward one step at a time. The knights raised their swords to punish the Templar, who sold his soul to a demon.

"God's hammer will smash the wicked who sold their soul to a demon!"

'I'm sure he was upset.'

"God's hammer will be used on the wicked who sold their soul to a demon!"

"That demon will be punished!

I felt something surging inside me. I was an expert director, so the scene before me looked like a well-planned scene. It was thanks to me that the situation turned out this way, but I wasn't the one who made this happen.

The priests surrounded the large spider demon.

A battle between good and evil; light and darkness was always an effective story.

As always, the scene wasn't all that different from any other similar scenes.

When Templar Simon swung his legs, the spirits of the priests were swept away. Despite that, they remained fearless, and they didn't retreat. The resentment that they had been accumulating for many years was etched on their faces.

They also looked happy about finally fulfilling their long-awaited wish.

"Retreat! Retreat!!!"

The most important part was that I was in the center of everything.

'Anyone would think I'm the one behind it.'

"Bestow upon him a comfortable… and eternal rest…" Draktaris muttered.

The rangers who had escaped the maze were watching the entire thing in disbelief.

"Father Lee Ki-Young…"

"What is…"

"What in the world…"

Naturally, they looked at me enviously. I was the creator of this miracle, and who wouldn't be jealous upon seeing this miraculous sight?

'It looks amazing even in my eyes.'

"Hyung-nim, I told you it's dangerous over there! Come over here!" Park Deok-Gu shouted.

"It's dangerous, hyung," Rafael said.

"Darling! What are you doing there?!" Cha Hee-Ra yelled.

Hee-Ra noona, Park Deok-Gu, and Rafael cast worried gazes at me, so I took a step backward, but this memorable scene would forever stay in everyone's memories.

"Stop! Stoooop!" Templar Simon shouted.

'What do you mean, stop?'

"*AAAHHH!* Bahamut! Bahamut!!!" Templar Simon yelled.

'Stop calling for him, damn it.'

"Save… me! Save me!" Templar Simon begged.

'There's no saving you now.'

"You'll be purified," Draktaris said.

'You're getting purified, not killed, so just accept it.'

"*AAAHHH!!!*"

The struggling spider's stamina was higher than I thought, and I became anxious for some reason.

'Shit.'

I had an idea as to what was going on, and it was all thanks to Park Yeon-Joo's report.

I could interpret it in many ways, but the mural told me that the demon seed inside Bahamut had already bloomed. The remarks that Draktaris had made about demons and the unique aura of the priests were hints as well, but it'd be a different story to see it for myself.

'Stupid Bahamut.'

I warned him not to get obsessed with power.

'Kim Hyun-Sung is a problem as well.'

The four-star Bahamut was afraid of the seven-star Kim Hyun-Sung, which was why he got so obsessed with power. He had to have been really afraid, and I was sure of that, as they had depicted Kim Hyun-Sung as the orange demon.

I was sure he couldn't understand it, and he also couldn't accept that outcome.

In the end, Bahamut forgot about the Priest of Prophecy's words and blamed everything on his incompetence. At the time, he actually couldn't do anything.

He couldn't move because he was afraid that the demon seed inside of him would bloom, and he froze like a statue upon seeing Kim Hyun-Sung.

He somehow managed to overcome his fears and make a move, but he was blasted away by just one swing of Kim Hyun-Sung's sword.

He was the Hero of the Continent at the time, so he probably felt humiliated; Kim Hyun-Sung probably felt like an obstacle that he needed to overcome. He could also be suffering from PTSD.

He was probably having nightmares featuring the so-called orange demon, who appeared one day and took everything he had. I was sure that the thought of the so-called orange demon alone was enough to make him tremble.

'He couldn't endure it and chose to become a demon.'

He walked a different path from Draktaris, who had decided to protect the Priest of Prophecy, the Underground Temple, and the continent.

It sounded dangerous, but it was a good situation. I already knew through Doom Doom Hyun-Sung that going "Doom" wasn't efficient. Skull Gray Hyun-Sung was strong, but he had his limits, so I was convinced that it would be the same for the others…

"So why isn't he dying?" I questioned.

"You dirty bastards… you dirty priests!" Templar Simon shouted.

'Why the hell are you so strong?'

"*AAAHHH! AAAAHHH!* I'll punish all of you!" Templar Simon yelled.

'Is he no longer human?'

Was that why his stats had increased? Was there another job advancement route upon going Doom? The thought of Doom Doom Hyun-Sung advancing like Templar Simon was scary, but I felt like the Doom Doom Doom Hyun-Sung route was already

unlocked.

'Hyun-Sung won't become a spider, though… '

Perhaps he'd transform into a wolf or a griffon. He was obsessed with griffons, after all. I felt like he could turn into something more hideous than Doom Doom Hyun-Sung, but his appearance wasn't that important.

'This is bad… '

I had no idea how much stronger Bahamut had become upon going Doom.

Templar Simon didn't worship Bahamut; he was just afraid of the latter.

It was none of my business whether Bahamut had abused him or not, but I was sure that many things had happened at the time.

Templar Simon had to have witnessed everything, including how Bahamut had changed, as well as how cruel and dark he could become. The demonization had to have decreased his intelligence, but even a dumbed-down version of him was really afraid of Bahamut.

"He's really terrible. That spider… How can a person turn into a spider…" Park Deok-Gu complained.

"…"

"Templar Simon is a hunter, hyung," Rafael informed.

'I already know.'

"The raid is going well, and it's all thanks to the spirits. It's great that the allied forces barely have casualties… but I can't really be happy about it," said the hunting dog of Rafael's party.

"What do you mean?"

"Templar Simon is a hunter. The maze was his hunting ground, so he must be a boss monster made for that maze. We can assume there's a limit to what he can do in a large place like this. His Endurance must be low, and he can't withstand the holy

power of the Underground Temple's spirits. That makes sense. I'm sure that's why he advanced," Rafael explained.

"I understand what you're saying," replied the hunting dog.

"I don't know who this Bahamut is, but…"

"Are you saying he's stronger than you thought?" the hunting dog asked.

Rafael nodded. He glanced at me, and he seemed satisfied with his assumption. He looked like he wanted me to compliment him, but I didn't bother saying anything.

'He did *grow a lot.'*

He grew taller and got smarter.

"Bahamut! Bahamut!" Templar Simon shouted.

I was sure he understood it better since he had experience fighting Draktaris.

"It's pretty clear…"

It was pretty clear that Templar Simon was getting beaten up, but…

'His resistances are really high.'

Templar Simon was a coward, but he was not weak.

He was cautious and opportunistic. He wanted to draw a bigger picture by trapping our forces in the maze, but it did not happen. Unfortunately, it was undeniable that he was in his most efficient form. He chose to have sharp legs rather than large arms, and he also chose Agility rather than Endurance, as Agility would allow him to move quietly.

Rafael was right. The maze was Templar Simon's home. If the raid had started there, it would have easily become unsustainable.

We were the ones who had chosen a battlefield that was advantageous to us, and the allied forces had the upper hand in terms of teamwork, but…

'That's not the case now.'

"Save me… I don't want to die… *AAAHHH! AAAHHH!*"

'Cunning bastard.'

Templar Simon curled up using his legs and climbed up to the ceiling by scaling the walls. He pursed his lips and hissed, shooting out spider webs.

A holy barrier enveloped the expedition group, but the barrier shattered with a sizzle. The sticky and elastic spider webs were acidic, which put us at a disadvantage. After all, Templar Simon could make use of that to transform the terrain into his hunting ground.

'Phase two.'

"Are you analyzing it, hyung?" asked Rafael.

I didn't bother answering it because it was true

Moments later, I looked up.

"All right!" Rafael exclaimed.

'At least he's quick-witted.'

Rafael spread his gray wings and flew up. The spider webs converged on Rafael, sealing off his escape routes, but Rafael could still make it out of that encirclement. I gave Rafael his escape route, and he immediately followed it.

'He's pretty good.'

Rafael barely escaped the acidic spider webs, and he even started spinning in the air. The fancy moves were unnecessary, but he looked pretty cool. He cut down the ones he couldn't dodge.

The mission required quite a bit of focus because if the spider web touched him, he'd get caught in the web and would be forced to retire.

He also had to cut them down with a single strike or…

‘Or he'll get caught… ’

Still…

‘His performance has improved a bit.’

Rafael was no longer a bumpy ride. However, it would still be absurd for me to compare him to Bahamut, even though he was doing pretty well against Templar Simon.

‘But we have to get what we can.’

It wasn’t bad since we would obtain a sample. Actually, the more samples we had, the better.

Meanwhile, Commander Jin seemed to have met the other guy.

I looked at him using my telescope, and I saw him tapping his fingers together while seated.

* * *

“Bahamut… is coming…” Templar Simon muttered.

“…”

“…”

“That's all you know how to say, right?”

CHAPTER 999
YOU REAP WHAT YOU SOW (6)

The type of demon they encountered was completely different from us. I was worried that perhaps he was Genny, but it was highly likely that the demon before them was one of the remaining Templars whom I had yet to meet.

The towering demon had a head that seemed to be a cross between a bull's and a snake's head. Unlike Templar Simon, the snake-headed and bull-headed demon appeared to be pretty sturdy, so I assumed its stats were more Endurance oriented.

Just like Templar Simon, the demon kept shouting Bahamut's name, and his gaze was filled with fear for his master.

The demon roared loudly as he stood up, and the expedition members who encountered him all looked nervous.

I was sure they could feel his strength, as they were competent and were aware that he was on a different level compared to the monsters they had encountered so far. I was kind of worried, but I wasn't *too* worried.

The way Jin Cheong sat on that chair with an arrogant look while tapping his finger made me feel a bit annoyed, but the villain demon summoner was never incompetent.

'Moreover... '

Hyun-Sung was with them. If the demon's attack pattern was predictable, it wouldn't be that hard for them to defeat him. They couldn't make a mistake here, as this was a high-level raid.

Fortunately, I couldn't imagine that psycho, who was a self-proclaimed perfectionist at the same time, making any absurd mistakes.

"*Roooooooooar!*"

The raid was going smoothly.

The monster charged like a bull, and protection spells were instantly stacked before it.

The spells shattered, but they were effective.

The spells that took the brunt of the demon's attack in their place allowed them to withstand the demon's attack. Buffs were instantly applied on the main tank, and debuffs were cast on the bull.

There was a *boom*, and the bodies of one of the tanks cracked open in an instant, but his injuries recovered as quickly as they appeared.

'This won't be easy.'

It was impossible for mages to cast attack spells, as offensive was not their priority.

They probably thought that casting protection spells to stop the demon's charge was their priority.

As expected, the mages started channeling their next spell.

Yoo Ah-Young, the Blue Guild's sub-tank, fixed her helmet and stepped in front of the demon. When the demon saw Yoo Ah-Young, he moved and swung his fist toward the latter, but like earlier, barriers manifested before Yoo Ah-Young, protecting her.

The demon summoner moved his finger arrogantly as a warrior from the Republic moved forward.

They were creating an environment that would allow the tanks to keep recovering while stopping the enemy's attacks. Jin Cheong dispatched vanguards capable of withstanding the demon's attack even once, and he didn't hesitate to invest spells in them.

It felt like several matadors had surrounded the bull.

Jin Cheong's tactics seemed inhumane, as it was like he was treating them as mere chess pieces, but it was an organized assault. The empty spaces that the vanguards had left behind were filled in by the assassins.

Kim Ye-Ri stood before the demon bull.

'Are they using her as an evasion tank?'

It seemed that the demon summoner's assumption was correct. Kim Ye-Ri dodged the demon bull's attack by just a hair's breadth. Kim Ye-Ri looked really nervous, as she knew that one mistake would instantly kill her.

Every time Jin Cheong moved his finger, the troops would move. Every time the stupid bull wasted his turn, the allies made a meaningful turn. Every single move was calculated, and not everyone could do something like this.

Jin Cheong was maximizing the tiny advantages gained at every turn while moving one step farther.

The sight reminded me of the Republican War.

The expedition group looked like they were sweating out of exertion.

The demon bull ran wild while roaring, and the allied troops were busy regrouping because they were being pushed back.

However, the reality was different. In my eyes, the monster looked like he was slowly falling into a trap. Of course, there was a difference from earlier. Earlier, the demon bull had a sword that he could swing.

Unfortunately, the formation that Jin Cheong had created, the turns that he had maximized, and the tiny advantages that he gained during the fight were all for the sake of the expedition's sharpest sword.

Kim Hyun-Sung walked down the path created by the gap between the tanks, mages, vanguards, and the troops. Jin Cheong made use of the top DPS during this turn to retaliate against the demon bull.

The archers shot their arrows in support while the vanguards attacked the demon bull's armor to attract his attention.

Eventually, Kim Hyun-Sung joined the fight and swung his sword.

When I saw him nod, I became convinced that he was satisfied with this situation.

‘He’s having fun for no reason.’

It was always worth it to create space for a close-combat DPS like Kim Hyun-Sung. He probably hadn't received any orders, as all he had to do was get in place and just swing his sword.

‘It’s pretty annoying.’

Jin Cheong looked really smug right now as if everything was going according to plan.

"Commander?"

—…

"Commander."

— What’s wrong? I’m busy right now. If you have something to tell me, tell me.

"Please save energy and save the ordinary troops."

— I don’t understand what you’re saying.

"It’s like I said. Don’t reveal our forces, and don’t make Hyun-Sung waste his energy before the main event. Of course, the same goes for the Blue Guild members.

"You know that you need to have troops for the fight with Bahamut, right? Exclude the ordinary troops unless it is necessary. Anyway, I'm sure you’ll need some time to organize this, so I’ll give you five minutes to do it."

— I don’t understand why you’re making that decision. I’m the field commander here. My choices are—

"I’m the one in charge. Even if you don’t want to do it, I can just proceed with it. And you have to know that I gave you five minutes because I know that you need some time to organize this."

—…

"Please keep me updated."

I felt slightly better when I saw Jin Cheong slamming his fist into his armrest.

There would be some variables during the restructure.

‘If it’s an emergency, he’ll either dispatch Kim Hyun-Sung or jump into the battle himself.’

He wouldn't be able to act arrogantly in that chair anymore.

— Hyung? Hyung?

"Please do it yourself, Mr. Rafael."

— *Ah…* okay.

Saving Kim Hyun-Sung's stamina was a wise decision. I couldn’t help but think that way as we were taking our sweet time with our hunt here.

“Save meeeee! I don’t want to die!” The monster was pretending to be weak, but it was furiously swinging its legs. His attack patterns were changing nonstop. He spat out spider webs while moving around on the ceiling, and he didn’t hold back on inflicting damage on the expedition group.

Despite dispatching Park Deok-Gu and the guild members, the battle remained the same. Of course, we were inflicting damage on him as well, but…

‘They’re slow.’

Draktaris was strong, but he couldn’t deliver his finishing blow due to the priests.

“Bahamut! Bahamut!”

I didn’t want to look anxious, but I couldn’t help it.

The slower the raid became, the more uncomfortable I felt.

Rafael was anxious, looking like his mouth was dry, and I was sure he felt frustrated by my reaction. At first, he thought that they were driving the monster into a corner, but the hunt wasn't going well at all.

'It's not enough.'

If they were struggling with a spider, how would they face Bahamut?

I had prepared one more insurance, but…

'Where is Templar Gen?'

"Please send reinforcements," Rafael requested.

"Rafael?"

"Priests, please send reinforcements!" Rafael exclaimed.

And that was when a large spear of light manifested above the priests…

The spear streaked across the air, piercing the monster's outer shell.

"*Ahhhh!*" the monster screamed.

Rafael spread his wings and flew toward the monster with his sword in hand. A gray light burst out of the sword as Rafael thrust forward, stabbing the monster.

A grotesque noise echoed as a green liquid gushed out of the wound.

Cha Hee-Ra nodded as if it was okay, but…

"I like him," Cha Hee-Ra said.

'It's a mess.'

If it hadn't been for the fact that the priests here were competent, they would have already suffered severe injuries.

I wanted to compliment them for landing a powerful blow, but a compliment here wasn't going to be helpful.

The monster's figure was rapidly melting and recovering with a sizzling noise.

Rafael swung his sword relentlessly as if he was desperate to drive the monster into

a corner.

"*Ahhhhhhhhh!* It hurts! It *huuuurts!*" the monster roared. He swung his large legs in the air and was trying his best to get out of this place. He used his legs to destroy the walls to create an exit route…

"Don't let him escape! Damn it!" Rafael swore, becoming anxious for some reason. He bit his lips and swung his sword rapidly. Anyone could tell that the situation was a mess, but we had the advantage, which was why we could control the situation.

Boom! Kaboom!

"Bastards! Bastards! It huuuuurts!"

The end was near, but it was painful to watch any longer.

Draktaris sent wave after wave of holy power toward the spider.

Meanwhile, the spider and Rafael were wasting their stamina in a meaningless game of tag. The spider was using his legs to break down our barrier in a desperate bid to escape his predicament.

BOOM!

"*HAHAHAHAHAHA!*" The struggling and afraid monster cackled. "*Hahahahaha! Hahahahaha!*"

'Shit… '

"Bahamut… will—*Argh!*"

An enormous hand popped out from the other side and grabbed the spider's head.

"Bahamut… I'm sorr… Save—"

C*rack!*

The spider's head shattered into a grotesque lump.

My heart started pounding wildly against my chest.

There was a thunderous boom, and the wall was destroyed.

Moments later, he finally showed himself.

“What the hell… is that…” Some expedition members mumbled while hugging their trembling figures. “Monster… a monster…”

‘Shit… shit… shit… ’

I saw Cha Hee-Ra baring her teeth. I was worried that she'd charge, so I turned around and hugged her. I grabbed her collar and looked as if I were about to collapse at any moment. Otherwise, she’d run at it like a lunatic.

“Darling?” Cha Hee-Ra said.

I obviously looked frightened. Most importantly, I looked like I could not accept this reality.

“…”

“Noona, run…” I muttered.

“Wait…

“Hee-Ra noona, run… Right now, I…” I trailed off.

“…” “Run…” I repeated.

And there was a deafening noise. "*Roaaaaar!*"

The newcomer was Bahamut, and the both of us shared a heartwarming friendship tens of thousands of years ago. It had been many, many years since then, but I still hadn't been able to forget him.

Tragically, he had become a disgusting… and dirty monster.

“T-That disgusting monster…” I said.

CHAPTER 1000
YOU REAP WHAT YOU SOW (7)

"Roooooooooooooar!!!"

‘Shit… shit… ’

"Uuuuuuuuuuurgh…!"

Kabooooooooooom!

I couldn’t help but think that turning around immediately was a wise choice, and I was sure anyone would think the same if they could see what I was seeing right now.

“F-Father Draktaris…” I stuttered.

— Protect the Priest of Prophecy!

Boom!

With a single sweep of the demon's hand, everything before me was swept away.

Anything that the disgusting monster touched disappeared completely as if it were made out of sand. The loud noises didn’t stop, and I froze upon hearing the disgusting monster's creepy voice.

It felt like I was inside a tornado; it was like I'd get blown away at any moment now. The debris from the explosion flew around everywhere.

Park Deok-Gu raised his shield to prepare for whatever was going to happen, but he was being pushed back as well, and he ended up rolling on the ground.

A single blow from the monster had blasted away more than half of Draktaris’ priests. If it hadn't been for those spirits, the majority of the expedition members would have been forced to retire.

These troops were pretty tenacious, so the fact that a single blow was enough to put them out of commission made me feel upset.

'Should I have placed them in the back?'

Damn it, those priests…

'We can't lose any more of them.'

"Rafael!" I shouted.

"Yes!"

My brain was trying to find a way to resolve this shocking situation.

The disgusting monster's target wasn't the spirits, and I instantly saw through what he wanted, which was evidenced by the fact that he was still pummeling the carcass of the Templar spider.

There was no mistaking it; he wanted the feather hidden in the treasure vault.

I handed the feather over to Rafael, and he passed by Cha Hee-Ra using his gray wings…

"I trust you… Mr. Rafael," I said.

He flinched for a moment before smiling brightly and nodding.

"O-Okay! I won't disappoint you," Rafael said.

"T-This…"

Of course, I handed him a reliable item along with the feather.

He couldn't make any mistakes in this mission, so I needed something I could rely on to ensure that he would not die. I also wanted him to feel a sense of accomplishment, even if he ended up getting squished like a bug.

I handed him a tiny rosary that I fished out from my pocket.

Rafael accepted it with a shocked look, and he seemed determined to complete his mission even at the cost of his life.

“Even if it… costs me my life…” Rafael said.

‘You don’t really need to do that, but I like that mindset of yours.’

His mission was pretty obvious, and he knew what he had to do.

‘Bait.’

As expected, Rafael’s party members were shocked. They tried to stop him, but…

“Rafael! That’s…!”

“R-Rafael!”

Rafael, my trustworthy and precious little brother, didn’t even look back as he charged into the battlefield.

‘He won’t get caught that easily.’

'No, I won’t let him get caught easily.'

Rafael shoved the feather into his mouth, and then he placed the rosary around his neck. He spread his gray wings and looked the disgusting monster in the eye.

"*Roooooooooooooar!*"

I was afraid that he'd look this way, so I hugged Hee-Ra noona tighter and tried to hide myself. Bahamut looked insane, so it was better to be safe than sorry. With that in mind, I decided to keep myself hidden.

Unlike Templar Simon or Templar Extra, who was still awake…

‘I think all he has left are his instincts… ’

Basically, Templar Bahamut had become a monster who was only moving based on his instincts. He had been relying on a mere feather for tens of thousands of years until he could no longer hold on and sold his soul to a demon.

It was none of my business what happened during that time, but I knew one important thing—It was the fact that he turned into a disgusting monster. No, it was the fact that he was obsessed with that feather.

"*Uuuuuuuuuuurgh!*"

Kabooooooooooom!

Bahamut moved in the blink of an eye, and he moved so fast toward Rafael that I couldn't believe the sight before me. He had such a colossal figure, so how was he moving that fast?

Rafael stretched out his wings and tried to move as far away as possible from Bahamut.

It was a fight between a beast chasing after prey. If we were in an enclosed space, Rafael would lose in no time, but that was not the case. Rafael had a ton of space to work with.

'He can use the entire Underground Temple.'

That was why I chose this location.

Kabooooooom!!!

The walls collapsed, and I could hear loud noises from every direction.

The monster stretched out his hand toward Rafael, who was barely out of his reach.

The two of them—no, my precious younger brother and the disgusting monster disappeared in an instant. H

Be bought us time to regroup, but I couldn't relax because I needed to be his eyes. I needed to give him the route he had to take as well as his escape routes. I also had to ensure tha those routes were the most efficient route possible.

A massive hand split the air.

"Head underground."

— O-Okay!

"You don’t have to answer, Mr. Rafael. Just focus on your opponent."

— Okay.

"Careful."

—Yes, sir!

I looked at Sun Hee-Young, and she nodded at me. I wanted a report on the reorganization of the troops and the current situation.

Cha Hee-Ra, who was still hugging me, seemed like she wanted to charge at the monster right now, but she couldn’t leave the wounded Saint of Sacrifice by himself.

In the end, she had to have concluded that focusing on the back end of things with Sun Hee-Young was the best thing she could do here.

‘It worked out.’

Hee-Ra noona was the type to keep her word. Of course, she didn’t look away from the disgusting monster, and she looked like a massive lion walking on two legs. Actually, I was not even sure whether "lion" was the right word to describe her, as her hair and the fringe near her neck were what made her stand out.

The monster had four disgusting eyes and sharp fangs dripping with pitch-black saliva.

The monster's entire body seemed to be rotting as well.

'Did he hurt himself?'

Black blood was oozing out of him.

There was a snake-shaped monster on his sharp tail, and his tail had two eyes.

"Demon" was the only word I could use to describe him. He gave off a stench that made me feel like my soul was rotting at the smell of it alone. He also had muscles that looked like they were about to burst, but the structure of his muscles, which

looked like they couldn't possibly exist on a human, was beyond disgusting and bizarre.

The word "evil spirit" wouldn't be enough to describe him, and I finally understood why Templar Simon was so obedient and afraid of him.

‘Doom Doom Hyun-Sung was handsome compared to him.’

He was clearly a monster.

'Ah, come to think of it, there is one silver lining. At least we managed to avoid that ending where our heads go flying.’

I was convinced that he had no skill that would allow him to chop off everyone's heads at once. It was highly likely that we'd reach a bad ending where we'd all get mutilated.

He was as strong as he was disgusting, and my mind went blank at the thought that I'd have to find a way to beat him.

"I’m going to change the route."

—…

"Move even faster for four minutes. I’ll help you after that, Mr. Rafael."

— O-Okay! *Ugh.*

BOOM!

‘He’s learning.’

Bahamut seemed to have realized that the wind pressure by his attacks alone was affecting Rafael, but I could use that to my advantage, as I could see the direction of the wind.

Rafael struggled in the air for a moment, but he immediately rode the wind and started creating distance from the monster. Of course, it only lasted for a moment. Bahamut pushed away all obstacles and caught up to my younger brother.

It happened in an instant.

Rafael passed through a small space, and the monster shattered the obstacles in his way before reaching out toward Rafael.

I heard a loud cry in response.

The game of tag was so violent that I got worried about the Underground Temple itself.

The scenery around Rafael changed, but Bahamut's large arm was still chasing him.

He was going underground, so the large arm was coming down from the ceiling.

The ceiling was destroyed, causing debris to fall, but there was an exit up ahead. The monster tried to follow Rafael using his tail, but Rafael flew toward the ceiling once again. Then, he dove once again.

'Fifty seconds.'

It had only been fifty seconds, but I was already getting tired.

Rafael was also reaching his limits.

"Commander, order all troops to retreat right now."

— What the hell are you talking about?

"The Templar Extra raid ends here. We encountered Templar Bahamut, and Rafael is trying to exhaust him by acting as bait. We'll proceed with the Bahamut raid. I'll give you exactly four minutes to retreat and send your first wave of troops. After that, I'll give you time to proceed in order."

— What? What are you…

"I'll leave it up to you to dispatch the troops. I sent you Rafael's exit route. I also sent information and videos related to that, so please take a look. Noona. I know she's angry as well, but help me out this time. I need help."

—…

—…

"Noona, please."

—…

"Miss Lee Ji-Hye? The cute and beautiful Miss Lee Ji-Hye?"

—…

"Ji-Hye…"

—…

"My love?"

—…

"Master? M-Mr. Lee Ji-Hoo?"

— Well… it wouldn't hurt to give you a hand.

-…

— My darling will die an unnatural death if things go wrong, so I should help out. In exchange, I get a wish.

"Thanks, noona. Ah! You don't get a wish, Commander."

— I never expected one, you fool.

There was no need for me to explain the details, as I was sure that they'd understand what I was trying to do with just a mere glance at the escape route.

'Take advantage of the Underground Temple and proceed with the raid with Rafael acting as an evasion tank.'

'I'll create the path, and Commander Jin will place troops on each floor based on Rafael's route.'

Jin Cheong was great at moving humans as if they were chess pieces.

Ji-Hye noona would ensure catch any errors and variables. She'd also approve any plans that were being carried out in real time.

I wasn't exactly a fan of this. The three of us didn't really like others to evaluate us, so our plans so far belonged solely to us. We had to deal with the variables in our plans ourselves. In other words, we were moving inside our own territories, but…

'This one is different.'

The smallest mistake would annihilate the expedition group, and I wasn't the only one who was aware of the fact that Bahamut was dangerous—extremely dangerous.

'There's no room for errors.'

Everything had to be in the right place for things to work out.

I put up the mirror, and screens instantly appeared around me.

I was sure it was the same for Commander Jin Cheong. He was probably looking at the screen that looked like a 3D replica of the Underground Temple, and Ji-Hye noona was probably in the office, staring at the screen with her legs crossed.

"…"

"…"

"Let us begin."

— Agreed.

— Got it, oppa.

"Let us have fun," I muttered to myself.

Except for the screens in front of me, everything around me became blurry.

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